DARK Black Magic

BY ANGELTWIST

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Dark Black Magic

By angeltwist

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Chapter 1

::W E L C O M E::

This story was originally written in **2009** and I am in the process of editing the story.

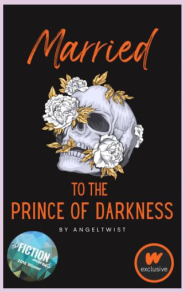
Due to this, there may be a few minor inconsistencies in the story whilst some of the older chapters wait to be edited.

All edited chapters will have this header located at the top of the chapter:

Where you see this header, you'll know that the chapter has been edited.

PLEASE NOTE: This is the third book in the Vampire Court series, however you can read this story as a stand alone. The other books in the series are:

1#



2#

Available to read now!

Before you read this story, please make sure you are safe to do so by reading this list of trigger warnings below.

This story is rated mature and contains adult themes.

::T R I G G E R W A R N I N G S::

Sexual Content

Sex scenes

Violence

Death - Murder - Threat to Life - Descriptions of Blood

Mental Health

Suicide - Self-Harm - Eating Disorders - Bereavement

Other

Mild references to drug taking (but no depictions of drug taking)

Chapter 2

::Chapter One::

Rayne - Prince of Ruin

I raised a finger, and silence blanketed the hall.

Hundreds of demons, from the lowliest scuttling imps to the towering behemoths of Hell's upper echelons, bowed their heads. Tails dipped low, claws retracted. No one dared to breathe without my permission.

This was my court. My realm. I ruled with absolute authority, and they knew it.

Leaning back against the obsidian throne, I gave my herald, Illya, a curt nod. It was time for the month's briefing. Illya, ever diligent, cleared his throat and motioned forward the first speaker: Scuttlewort, Lord of Night Terrors.

The diminutive incubus shuffled towards me, clutching something in his clawed hands that looked suspiciously like an iPhone.

"Your Vileness," he began, his raspy voice trembling under the weight of my scrutiny. "Our nightmare productivity has dropped twenty per cent in the past year alone."

I narrowed my eyes. "Why?"

He hesitated, glancing at the device in his claws as if seeking reassurance. "A trend among humans is interfering with our efforts. They've created a... a magical murmuring that calms their anxiety and fear."

"Magical murmuring?" I echoed, arching a sceptical brow.

"It's called ASMR, Your Vileness," Scuttlewort explained. "Humans listen to soothing sounds—hair brushing, whispering, tapping. Sometimes, it's elaborate roleplays. For example..." He cleared his throat and held up his phone. "I experienced one where I was a horse. A gentle farmer brushed my mane, fed me apples, and called me Buttercup."

The hall was silent, except for the crackling of the infernal braziers.

I blinked. "This is a real thing?"

Illya shrugged, clearly at a loss. Scuttlewort tapped his phone, and a video began to play. On the screen, a man dressed in overalls appeared, holding up a red apple with an indulgent smile.

"AirDrop me the link," I said flatly. "I'll review this in my chambers."

A year ago, I might have found such ramblings amusing. The absurdity of demons complaining about human coping mechanisms would have been

enough to brighten even my darkest days. But the looming apocalypse had sucked every ounce of humour from my existence.

The weight of my responsibility crushed even the faintest whisper of joy.

Every couple of centuries, rumours of an Antichrist child would surface—an unholy being destined to upend the natural order. And every time, it fell to my siblings and me to eliminate the threat. Not out of love for humanity, of course. No demon worth their salt cared whether mortals thrived or perished. But the natural order was sacrosanct. Gods in Heaven, man on Earth, and demons in Hell. That was the way of things.

This time, however, was different.

The child was not just a threat to humanity, but to existence itself. Prophecy foretold that this one wouldn't just tip the scales—it would shatter them entirely. If the child lived, it would herald the end of man, the destruction of Hell's domains, and even the demise of Heaven itself. Creation, as we knew it, would cease to exist.

Even Lucifer, who relished the torment of mortal souls, found the prospect intolerable. There would be no Hell to rule, no mortals to manipulate, and no enemies to fight if this child fulfilled its destiny. For once, he and God were in uneasy agreement: the child had to die before it could draw its first breath.

And so, the task of finding the child—and its mother—had fallen to me. Not because I wanted it, but because Lucifer deemed me the most competent of his sons. A dubious honour, at best.

At first, I thought it would be simple. Finding Antichrist spawn was usually a matter of following the telltale signs: cursed weather patterns, unnatural plagues, and spontaneous combustions. But this time, the trail was cold. The mother—a creature half-demon and half-vampire—was unlike anything I'd encountered before.

She could flit between the mortal realm and Hell at will, leaving no trace of her presence in either place. Her unique lineage gave her abilities beyond those of ordinary demons or vampires. And worse, she had

gathered a loyal following, a cult of fanatics devoted to keeping her and her unborn child hidden.

I, on the other hand, was bound by the same infernal rules that governed all demons. I could manifest in the mortal realm for no more than an hour each day before I was pulled back to Hell's burning plains. An hour was hardly enough time to track down a being who could vanish across realms at will.

It was maddening.

No matter how many leads I followed, no matter how many false trails I pursued, the result was always the same: failure. And with every passing day, the child's birth grew closer, the window to prevent the apocalypse shrinking by the second.

After dismissing my court, I returned to my chambers, poured myself a glass of whiskey, and sank into my armchair. The weight of my inadequacy pressed heavily on my shoulders.

The faint glow of my phone broke the darkness, and I absently tapped on the horse ASMR video Scuttlewort had shown me.

I watched as a man in overalls held up a shiny red apple, speaking softly about trust and care. Millions of years of evolution had culminated in... *this* .

Tapping the share button, I sent the video to Lucifer with a simple caption: *Your thoughts?*

His reply came almost instantly: *LMAO* .

Typical. Lucifer delighted in humanity's absurdity. God's so-called masterpiece had always been his favourite punchline.

Yet, I couldn't help but wonder if Lucifer's disdain masked something deeper. Perhaps he didn't want the world destroyed—not out of love, but because tormenting humans was his greatest source of entertainment.

My musings were interrupted by a swirl of shadows pooling to my left. Loki—my brother, not the Norse god, nor the Marvel character—stepped into the room, a coffee cup in hand. The name *Lucky* was scrawled across it in black marker.

"How goes the hunt for Rosemary's baby?" Loki asked, his tone light, as if we were discussing nothing more serious than the weather.

"Frustratingly slow," I admitted, my frustration bleeding through despite my best efforts. "The one-hour rule for Earth has become... problematic."

Loki paused, his dark eyes narrowing slightly. He opened his mouth, then seemed to think better of it, shaking his head.

I arched an eyebrow. "What?"

"You could... well, you could do what Alyd did," he said at last, his tone casual but his smile sharp.

I stiffened. Alyd. Just hearing the name made my jaw tighten. Once the most feared of us all, Alyd had been sent to stop an apocalypse centuries ago. He'd been Hell's champion, a warrior who bowed to no one.

Until he met *her.*

To buy himself more time on Earth, he bound his soul to a vampire queen—a bond he swore would be temporary. But it wasn't. He fell in love. Gave up his

court, his crown, his throne. He abandoned everything for her.

"Disgusting," I muttered under my breath.

"Not a vampire, then," Loki said, reading my reaction. "You'd need something weaker. A witch, perhaps."

I tilted my head. "You're suggesting I bind myself to a witch? As her *familiar* ?"

Loki smirked. "If you want to call it that, sure. A quick bonding spell would anchor you to the mortal realm. No more time limits. And if you choose a witch with no real power, she wouldn't be able to control you. You'd be the one in charge."

I stared at him, letting the idea sink in. A familiar. A pet. A glorified crow on someone's shoulder.

"You'd have all the time you need," Loki continued, his tone turning silkier. "Find the child, complete your mission. And when it's done..." He snapped his fingers. "You sever the bond. Simple."

"Sever the bond," I echoed.

"Kill her, if it comes to that," Loki said, his grin widening.

The suggestion coiled in my mind, a serpent tightening its grip. It was ruthless. Logical. Necessary. But I couldn't ignore the unease prickling at the edges of my thoughts.

"Alyd thought it would be temporary too," I said coldly. "Look where that got him."

Loki shrugged, unbothered. "Alyd's mistake was letting himself care. You're not Alyd."

I studied him, suspicion flickering in my chest. "Why are you helping me?"

"Maybe I've developed a fondness for humans," he said, his grin sharp. "They make life entertaining. No horse ASMR, no overpriced coffee—it'd be a tragedy, don't you think?"

I didn't believe him. Loki never did anything without an angle.

"Loki," I said, rising to my feet, my voice low and cold, "if you cross me, I'll forget you're my brother."

"Duly noted," he replied, his sing-song tone infuriatingly smug.

I wanted to dismiss him, to burn the idea to ash and refuse to even entertain it. But time was slipping away. The demon child would be born within weeks, and I was no closer to finding it than I'd been half a year ago.

I pulled out my phone and typed a message to Illya instructing him to prepare for my absence. I hit send then paused, typing out another message:

I f I go native, kill the girl to break the bond.

Insurance. I wouldn't make Alyd's mistake.

"Fine," I said finally, the word bitter on my tongue. "We'll proceed with your plan."

"Wonderful, I have just the person in mind," Loki said, his grin deepening. "Follow me."

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Chapter 3

::Chapter Two::

Skyler

I woke to the unmistakable sound of Grandma yelling at Grandpa to leave the house.

For a split second, I thought it might have been a dream. But no—her sharp voice cut through the floorboards, and the heavy footsteps pacing below confirmed it.

I groaned, rolling over and dragging my pillow over my head. Ghosts didn't care about sleep schedules, and apparently, neither did Grandma.

From her bedroom below, I could hear her muttering in broken English and Welsh. The words were sharp and musical, even if I didn't understand them. But I didn't need a translator to catch the frustration in her voice.

"You've been dead fifty years, Marvin! Why can't you leave us alone?"

Her shout echoed through the house, louder than the morning birds outside my attic window.

I sniffed the air and sat up abruptly, panic prickling the edges of my sleep-hazed brain. The smell of burning sage was faint but distinct, creeping into my room like an unwelcome guest.

"Seriously, Grandma?" I muttered.

She *knew* better. The smoke made her lungs seize up, and the coughing fits that followed were nothing short of terrifying. I'd spent months convincing her to use the sage spray I bought her, or at least the

cinnamon besom, but she'd refused both with a dismissive wave. *The old ways are the best ways,* she'd said. Apparently, those "old ways" included asphyxiating herself.

I shoved back the covers, yanked open the trapdoor to my attic, and called down, "Do I smell sage burning?"

Grandma appeared in her doorway, sage stick in hand, her wild curls escaping the bun she'd tried to wrestle them into. The smouldering bundle sent thin tendrils of smoke snaking into the air as she zigzagged it over her doorway. Her lips moved in quiet incantations as she traced invisible patterns through the space.

"Grandma!" I shouted. "Please tell me you didn't light that thing."

She paused, giving me a look that could curdle milk. "What's the alternative? Let your grandfather roam around like he owns the place?" She shook the smoking stick at me as if it were a weapon. "Skyler, when I married your grandfather, I vowed to love

and honour him *until death do us part.* Well, death has *happened* , and he needs to bloody well *part* !"

"Ghosts don't usually listen to wedding vows, Grandma," I said, leaning on the edge of the trapdoor. "Besides, I think it's kind of sweet he still visits you."

"Sweet?" She snorted. "He left me with a baby and a mortgage. If he wanted to be useful, he shouldn't have gotten drunk and driven off a mountainside."

Her words hung in the air, heavier than the smoke. I knew the story by heart. Grandpa had gotten behind the wheel after a few beers, swerved off the road, and left his truck dangling in the branches of a spruce tree like a macabre Christmas ornament.

Grandma had been only twenty—a new bride, a new mother, and suddenly, a widow in a foreign country. Her family back in Wales had sent money to help her scrape by, but resentment had replaced grief long ago.

"Grandma," I said, softening my tone, "can you please put out the sage? You know it's bad for your lungs."

She ignored me, still waving the stick like it was her badge of honour.

"He creeps around like a house spider," she said, her voice sharp with irritation. "Last night, he scared me half to death—standing at the foot of my bed, babbling on about his mother's scrying bowl. Like I know where the bloody thing is!"

I glanced toward her dresser and couldn't help but sigh. The bowl sat there in plain sight, overflowing with white ash and cigarette butts.

"It's on your dresser," I said, deadpan. "You've been using it as an ashtray."

Grandma squinted at the bowl, then shrugged. "Ah, well. It's an easy mistake to make."

"Grandma," I said, pinching the bridge of my nose, "you need new glasses."

"Oh, poo-poo. My eyesight is perfectly fine." She extinguished the sage stick with a practiced twist, then tipped the bowl's contents into the wastebasket. "It's your grandfather who's the problem. He's got

nothing better to do than mither over his mother's bloody bowl."

I sighed again, more deeply this time. "And please don't put the bowl in the dishwasher again."

She waved a dismissive hand. "Fine, fine. Take it to the creek and cleanse it. But if it's a harvest moon tonight, you'd better bless the pumpkins while you're at it. They're so small they could be mistaken for oranges."

I smiled despite myself. The garden hadn't done well this year, and the pumpkins were pitifully undersized. "I'll do the blessing tonight," I promised.

"Good. And use the blessing my troll friend gave me," she added casually. "Did I mention he has a very handsome son? His mother was a siren, so he's got the looks."

My smile dropped. "Grandma..."

"What? He's single. Works in his father's witchcraft shop. Seems like a good match for a smart young lady like you."

"I'm good, thanks," I said quickly. "The forest gives me everything I need."

"Except a man."

"Okay, this conversation is over," I said, pulling the trapdoor shut with finality.

It had always been like this, for as long as I could remember—just me and Grandma.

My mother had been a free spirit, as Grandma always put it. A wanderer. A dreamer. The kind of person who lived for adventure and cared little for roots. She disappeared when I was just a baby, leaving nothing behind but a faded photo and a vague memory for Grandma to spin into bedtime stories. Since then, it had been the two of us, tucked away from the world in our little cabin on the edge of the forest.

Grandma homeschooled me, teaching me everything she knew about the old ways. We grew our own food, foraged in the woods, and preserved enough to last us through the harsh winters. We made poultices, tinctures, and ointments from herbs and flowers,

selling them to a few trusted suppliers in town. It was a simple life, self-sufficient and grounded in nature.

For the most part, I loved it.

Our cabin was surrounded by towering trees, the kind that swayed in the wind and whispered ancient secrets. The dirt path that led to the main road felt like a line separating our world from everyone else's. There was freedom here—the kind that came from walking out your front door and stepping directly into the wild, where no one could tell you who to be or how to act.

But recently, that freedom had started to feel like a cage.

Grandma had been bringing up the subject of men more and more lately. At first, I'd brushed it off as her usual meddling. She'd always been half-serious about wanting great-grandbabies, casually throwing out the names of eligible men in town.

But lately, her tone had shifted. There was a nervous edge to her comments now, a kind of desperation that wasn't like her.

It wasn't about babies anymore. It was about me.

True, I was twenty-one and had never been asked out by a man. That part didn't bother me as much as it probably should have. I knew I was odd. The kind of odd people didn't know how to deal with, let alone fall in love with. But Grandma's sudden urgency made it clear that she was worried—worried about what would happen to me when she wasn't here anymore.

And the truth was, I was worried too.

I'd never let myself think about it before, but the thought of being completely alone in this cabin, miles away from anyone who might care, was terrifying. I didn't know how to live in the world outside these woods. I barely knew how to speak to people without feeling like I was saying the wrong thing. The few times we went into town, I could feel the stares, the whispers.

"Witch girl," they'd call me behind my back, thinking I couldn't hear.

And maybe they weren't wrong. I was a witch, in my own way. But hearing it said like that, with disdain and mockery, made the walls of my chest feel too tight. It reminded me that I didn't belong—that I'd never belonged.

What scared me most wasn't just the loneliness. It was the idea that I might never escape it.

What would happen to me when Grandma was gone? Would I spend the rest of my life here, wandering the woods alone, fading into the background until even the trees forgot I existed?

I shook my head, trying to push the thought away, but it clung to me like a shadow.

I loved this life—the cabin, the woods, the old ways—but I couldn't help feeling like I was standing on the edge of something. A cliff, maybe. Or a chasm. And I had no idea what was waiting for me on the other side.

I got dressed and made my way to the kitchen.

It was my favourite room in the house. The air was warm and alive with the mingling scents of herbs,

spices, jams, and the faint tang of woodsmoke. Sunlight streamed through the window, catching the trailing vines of ivy that Grandma insisted were "good luck."

The room felt like a sanctuary, cluttered with jars of dried flowers, bundles of lavender hanging from the beams, and baskets filled with apples waiting to be turned into cider. It was chaos, yes—but it was our chaos.

I wandered over to the log-burning stove, the kettle already starting to hum on its surface. Lifting the lid of a bubbling pot, I peeked at what Grandma had been cooking—wild berry jam, its rich, dark colour gleaming like a jewel.

My mouth watered at the sweet, tart aroma. Winter was fast approaching, and this jam, along with the rest of our preserves, would have to last us until spring. Living off the land meant careful planning and hard work, and though I loved it, this year had been... challenging.

The pumpkins, for one, had been a disaster. Pitifully small and shriveled, they looked more like

clementines than gourds. Grandma swore they'd been cursed.

"They're puny because something wicked has taken root," she'd declared, stomping through the garden banging two large saucepans together. "Spirits hate loud noises. That's how you drive them out!"

I'd watched from the porch as she clanged a pot and pan together, her wild curls bouncing with every emphatic stomp through the pumpkin patch and orchard. Now that the noisy part was done, it was my turn to finish the job.

The blessing lay waiting on the kitchen table. I set the jam spoon down and picked it up, curious.

Immediately, I frowned. This didn't look right.

Pumpkin blessings were usually sweet and cheerful, full of rhyming couplets about bountiful harvests and gratitude for the earth's gifts. This... wasn't that.

The paper was old, its edges curled and yellowed, the ink faded but sharp, written in a language I didn't recognise. The letters were spindly and angular, twisting across the page like skeletal vines.

"What is this?" I murmured to myself.

Next to the blessing sat a small scrap of paper with the instructions: simple enough. I only needed a single black candle to perform the ritual.

I glanced back at the blessing, an uneasy knot forming in my stomach. There was nothing cutesy about it. It didn't feel like something meant to nurture pumpkins or bring joy to a humble garden.

It felt... wrong.

"Grandma, are you *sure* this is the blessing?" I called out, holding the paper gingerly between my fingers.

"Is it the one on the table?" her voice floated back from the living room, accompanied by the rhythmic creak of her rocking chair.

"Yes..."

"Then that's the right one," she replied, her tone as casual as if we were discussing the weather.

I stared at the page again, my brow furrowing. Where on earth had she even found this? The letters

looked more like something out of a cursed grimoire than a sweet pumpkin blessing.

"Alright," I muttered under my breath. "If you say so."

Setting the paper back on the table, I turned toward the cupboard under the stairs. The black candle was tucked away in there somewhere, waiting for me. Normally, it was a place I avoided unless absolutely necessary.

The cupboard was practically alive, a dark, cramped space that had become its own ecosystem. Spiders spun their webs across jars of dried herbs, and moths fluttered in the stale air. It smelled of dust, old wood, and forgotten spells.

I opened the door cautiously, armed with a pair of salad tongs to shift aside the chaos inside.

"Please don't let anything jump out at me," I muttered under my breath.

The candle box was buried under a mound of jars and pouches, half-hidden behind a tangle of cobwebs. A particularly large spider perched on the box, its many eyes glinting in the dim light.

"Please move," I said, my voice low but firm.

For a moment, the spider stayed put, as if debating my request. Then, with deliberate grace, it scuttled back into the shadows of its web.

"Thank you," I whispered, carefully extracting the black candle from the box.

Once free from the cupboard, I set the candle in the centre of the kitchen table. The house felt different now, heavier, as if the air itself was holding its breath. I unfolded the blessing, my eyes scanning the jagged, curling script.

The words weren't in English—or any language I'd ever seen before. They looked strange, otherworldly, and just reading them made my head thrum.

"What have you given me, Grandma?" I muttered, shaking off the creeping unease.

I struck a match, lit the candle, and watched as the flame flickered to life. Shadows stretched long and deep across the room, twisting unnaturally with the movement of the flame.

Taking a steadying breath, I began to read.

The first word came out awkward, thick and guttural. It didn't feel like it belonged in my mouth. The second word was worse, as if the syllables resisted being spoken.

As I stumbled through the strange script, the air in the room grew colder. A faint breeze swept past me, carrying with it the faint smell of rain.

Outside, the wind began to rise, howling through the trees.

I hesitated, my fingers tightening on the paper. But I pushed on, my voice trembling as I forced the strange words past my lips.

The rain started then, soft at first but quickly escalating into a torrential downpour. The wind slammed against the windows, rattling them in their frames.

With every word I spoke, the storm intensified.

The candle flame flickered wildly, threatening to go out. My voice wavered, but I didn't stop. I was almost done.

The last word felt like a knife dragging across my tongue. I spat it out, then leaned forward and blew out the candle.

The flame vanished.

The storm outside stopped.

The silence that followed was absolute. No wind. No rain. Not even the usual creaks of the house. Just... nothing.

I stood there, frozen, the paper still clutched in my hand. The air was thick, charged, and I swore the shadows on the walls were moving, twisting in ways they shouldn't.

Something had changed.

I couldn't explain how I knew, but I could feel it. The blessing was anything but ordinary.

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Chapter 4

::Chapter Three::

Skyler

For the rest of the morning, I prowled the cabin, trying to work out what was wrong.

Where had Grandma found that blessing? I'd searched our family grimoires and the dozens of inherited books of shadows cluttering our shelves, but none of them contained anything remotely like it.

The language wasn't one of the dead classical tongues like Latin or Ancient Greek. It felt older than that—primordial, like it had been scratched into the bones of the earth itself.

"Grandma," I called, stepping into the kitchen where she was stringing rowan berries onto twine. "Where did you get the harvest blessing from?"

She didn't look up. "I got it from Marge."

I blinked. "Marge?" I asked incredulously. "Marge, who works at the thrift store?"

"Yes, Marge. She's the one with the two handsome grandsons," Grandma said with a knowing look. "Both, who I might add, are single. I could introduce you next time we head into town. Marco is a fantastic baker with arms like a bodybuilder, while his brother Francis is a college linebacker with a backside like a __"

"Are *either* of them experts in dead languages?" I interrupted, pinching the bridge of my nose.

Grandma stared at me, her brow furrowed. "Experts in dead languages? I think you're setting the bar a bit

bloody high, my girl. You want a boyfriend, not a scholar."

I groaned. "Grandma, I'm not romantically interested in them. I'm trying to understand how Marge knew what that blessing was."

Grandma put down her string of berries and turned to the kitchen table, picking up a piece of paper. She held it up, and my stomach flipped.

It was completely different.

This blessing was in English, printed in cheerful black letters inside a cartoon border of psychotic pumpkins dancing and laughing.

The blessing read:
Pumpkin, pumpkin, pumpkin,
Grow, grow, grow;
Let your orange skin,
Glow, glow, glow;
Before autumn flies, we deserve your,
Pie; pie; pie.
So...,

Pumpkin, pumpkin, pumpkin,
Grow, grow, grow!

My jaw dropped. This was *not* what I'd read earlier.

Grandma shuffled closer, peering at me like I was the strange one. "Skyler, did you have a sneaky try of Granny's secret medicinal mushrooms?"

I stared at her, aghast. "No! I was not high on hallucinogenic mushrooms. There was a paper *right there* with strange words—"

Grandma patted my shoulder and sighed. "There was one time when I had a bit of the old shroomies and ended up on the cabin roof declaring war on the King of Frogs in nothing but a pair of rain boots. So we've all been there, duck."

I gritted my teeth. "I. Was. Not. High."

She shot me a cheeky wink and returned to her rowan berries, humming under her breath.

I stared down at the blessing in my hands, my blood boiling. The cartoon pumpkins mocked me with their stupid grins and bouncing feet.

"This fluffy bunny garbage wasn't what I read," I muttered, crumpling the paper into a tight ball. I stomped over to the wood-burning stove, opened the door, and tossed it in.

The flames devoured it eagerly.

Grabbing my boots and green cloak, I pulled them on and headed outside. The cool autumn air nipped at my cheeks, crisp and biting. If the spell had been a simple pumpkin blessing, then surely the pumpkins should look different by now. Maybe that would clear up this mess.

I followed the path from the front door to the vegetable garden, my boots crunching over the scattered orange and brown leaves left behind by the freak storm. A few downed branches blocked the way, and I kicked the larger ones aside, making a mental note to clear them properly later so Grandma wouldn't trip.

The wooden gate marking the garden's entrance creaked loudly as I pushed it open. I hesitated at the threshold, scanning the garden. Everything seemed normal—or as normal as it could be after last night.

Instead of going inside immediately, I walked the perimeter, checking the fencing. A loose post or broken wire would mean trouble; rabbits and deer had no qualms about helping themselves to an unguarded garden.

I was halfway around the fence when something unusual caught my eye.

Something was lying in the pumpkin patch.

I froze.

At first, I thought it was an animal—a deer maybe, or a dog. But as I crept closer, my heart hammering in my chest, I realized it wasn't an animal. It was a person.

A man.

Heart pounding, I ran into the garden, my boots squelching in the damp soil. My cloak flapped behind me as I approached, and when I saw him fully, I stopped dead in my tracks.

He was lying face down between two enormous pumpkins, completely naked. His pale skin seemed to

glow in the soft morning light, glistening with dew. His hair, a soft silver-blond, was streaked with dirt but still managed to catch the sunlight, shimmering like molten metal. His body was lean but strong, every muscle defined like a statue carved from marble.

For a moment, I just stared.

I had never been this close to a man before—not like this. Certainly not one who looked like... this. He looked unreal, too beautiful to be human.

An angel, I thought absurdly. But no angel would crash-land naked in a pumpkin patch.

Steeling myself, I untied my cloak and draped it over him, trying to cover as much as I could of his indecency. He stirred slightly, mumbling something I couldn't understand before settling again, snoring softly.

I took a step back and cupped my hands around my mouth. "Grandma!" I shouted, my voice breaking. "Come quick! There's a naked man in the vegetable garden!"

The words felt ridiculous, but the situation was far beyond reason.

I crouched beside him, studying his face. It was flawless, sharp cheekbones and a jawline that could cut glass. His lashes were long and pale, brushing against his cheeks as he slept. His lips, slightly parted, were full and surprisingly soft-looking.

My gaze dropped lower, and I froze.

Tattooed across his chest in dark, elegant script was my name.

Skyler.

My breath hitched, and a cold shiver ran through me. What kind of spell had I cast?

Without thinking, I reached out and traced the tattoo with my fingertips. The skin beneath was cool, smooth like polished stone. The ink seemed to shimmer faintly under my touch, as though it was alive.

Suddenly, his eyes flew open.

I gasped, jerking my hand back, but it was too late. His hand shot up, catching mine in an iron grip. His fingers were long and cold, wrapping around my wrist with a strength that made my heart leap into my throat.

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Chapter 5

::Chapter Four::

Rayne - Former Prince of Ruin

The summoning came at the worst possible time—my bath time.

I was soaking my muscles in a tub of steaming water, letting the tension melt from my shoulders, when a disembodied female voice spoke my name. At first, I thought it was one of the servants bringing me a

towel, but the tone lacked reverence, and the address wasn't the usual *Your Unholiness.* That was my first clue something was amiss.

The words continued, clear and insistent, spoken in the Devil's tongue:
"Answer me, my Dark Lord. I require a servant. This daughter of night offers her soul for your power, her life for your protection, and her heart for your magic. Will you accept my offer?"

"Very well," I muttered, lounging deeper into the water. "Yes, I accept you as my mistress."

The ground beneath my feet began to tremble.

I sat upright, water sloshing around me as a deep, thrumming energy filled the room. My amusement quickly turned to unease as the marble floor cracked beneath the tub, fractures spidering outward with unnatural speed.

Thick green ivy erupted from the cracks, curling and twisting like serpents as it reached for me.

I froze, staring in disbelief. This wasn't the meek, hesitant magic of a powerless witch. This was wild,

untamed, and teeming with life. It was earthy and primal, as if it had been pulled straight from the roots of the world.

This can't be right.

Her magic wrapped around my ankles first, coiling tightly before snaking up my legs and arms. I felt its strength in every tendril—raw, unrefined, yet impossibly potent.

"Impossible," I whispered, my voice barely audible over the rumbling beneath me.

Her magic shouldn't be this strong. A girl with no power wasn't supposed to summon me with such ease. She wasn't supposed to have *this* .

The vines tightened their hold, and I clenched my fists as a surge of panic shot through me.

"What are you?" I muttered, though I knew there would be no answer.

The creepers continued to climb, twisting over my chest, wrapping around my neck. The magic burned cold, alive with an energy that set my nerves alight. I

had intended to brush off the summoning as nothing more than a temporary inconvenience, but this... this was something else.

I glared at the ivy, determined to wrest control. "Take me to my mistress," I commanded, my voice sharp.

The vines hesitated for a moment, then surged upward, covering my face and lifting me off the floor. I caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror as the green consumed me entirely.

And then I was gone.

The magic carried me through the fractured marble into a dark void, a place that was neither Hell nor Earth. It was damp and stifling, pressing against my skin with a suffocating weight. Pain licked at me, sharp and stinging, as if the magic resented my presence.

It was too much. Too powerful.

This wasn't the work of a helpless girl.

And then, without warning, I was falling.

Rain and wind buffeted me as I plummeted through the mortal realm's night sky. Her magic had thrown me out like trash, spitting me high above the earth with no regard for my dignity.

I tried to shimmer, to teleport safely to the ground, but my power didn't respond. I was helpless, tumbling through the storm until—

Boom.

Impact.

I roused to the delicate sensation of fingers tracing across my chest. The touch was soft, hesitant, as though the person it belonged to was afraid of what they might find.

My awareness flickered awake slowly, the world around me muted. The damp earth beneath my back, the cool dew clinging to my skin, and above it all, the peculiar warmth of her touch.

I kept my eyes closed for a moment longer, savoring the intimacy of it—a small, fleeting comfort I didn't deserve.

Then I heard her voice.

"Grandma! There's a naked man in the garden!"

The words jolted me fully awake, her voice frantic and high-pitched.

From somewhere distant, a second voice called back, amused and utterly unfazed. "Is he old or young?"

"Young!" she shouted.

"Happy days, duck! Stay there; I'm coming!"

A groan slipped from my lips, the absurdity of the exchange grating against my nerves. I opened my eyes, catching the girl mid-recoil as her fingers jerked away from my chest. Her hand hadn't gotten far before I caught it in mine.

Her gasp was sharp, her eyes—wide and impossibly bright—locked onto mine. I held her wrist in an iron grip, my fingers curling around her delicate bones like a cage.

For a moment, neither of us moved.

She was striking in a way I hadn't expected. Young, yes, but not in the polished, insipid way of mortals

who prized themselves on appearance. She was all wild, raw edges, her hair a riot of fire around her face, her skin luminous against the earthy backdrop of the garden. And her eyes—bright blue and burning with both fear and something that looked like defiance.

"You're bold," I murmured, my voice low and velvety, the edge of a smirk tugging at my lips. "Touching a man while he sleeps?"

Her cheeks flushed a deep crimson, and she yanked her hand back, stumbling as she put distance between us.

"You—you were in my garden!" she stammered, her voice trembling.

"And now I'm awake," I replied, sitting up slowly. The cloak draped over my shoulders slipped as I moved, and I caught the way her gaze darted away, the heat rising to her cheeks again.

"Stay there!" she blurted, holding up a hand as though it could stop me. "Don't—just don't move."

Her boldness caught me off guard, and I tilted my head, watching her with a flicker of amusement. "You're giving me orders now?"

"Yes!" she snapped, though her voice wavered slightly. "I don't know who you are or why you're here, but—"

"Rayne," I said, cutting her off, my tone soft but firm.

Her brow furrowed, her lips parting. "What?"

"My name," I said, standing slowly, deliberately. "It's Rayne."

She took another step back, clutching the wooden gate behind her as though it might anchor her. The movement sent a sharp pang of irritation through me. Was she truly so afraid?

Wrapping the cloak around myself with a fluid motion, I held her gaze, letting a smirk curve my lips. Her fear was warranted—but not for the reasons she imagined.

"You summoned me," I said, my voice calm, as though stating the weather.

She froze, her breathing shallow as the words settled over her. "What do you mean, I summoned you?"

Her question carried an edge of panic, but beneath it was curiosity, as though part of her already knew the answer and was waiting for me to confirm it.

I let the smirk grow, leaning just slightly closer. "Exactly that, little witch."

She frowned, the expression creasing her delicate features, clearly unused to even the mildest form of flirtation. There was something almost endearing about her discomfort, her obvious attempt to maintain composure while her wide eyes betrayed her unease.

Loki, you bastard.

He had picked a complete innocent. The thought was absurd, almost laughable, given the power she'd unknowingly wielded to summon me. It didn't add up. How could such potent, untamed magic come from someone who couldn't even hold my gaze for more than a heartbeat?

Her voice cut through my thoughts, soft but steady. "How did you get here?"

I tilted my head slightly, studying her. For all her awkwardness, there was something persistent in the way she stood—like she was bracing herself for an answer she wasn't sure she wanted to hear.

"I came..." I said, pausing for effect, "...from up there."

I pointed toward the sky with a casual flick of my hand, watching as her brows drew together in confusion.

She glanced up instinctively, her gaze scanning the clear blue expanse, then dropped back down to me. Her skepticism was palpable. "How did you come from *up there* ?" she asked, her tone sharp with disbelief.

I allowed a faint smirk to tug at the corner of my lips. "It doesn't matter," I replied, dismissing her question with a wave of my hand. "Just put it from your mind."

Her frown deepened, her frustration simmering just beneath the surface. She crossed her arms, clearly not satisfied with my answer.

"How am I supposed to forget a buck-naked man lying face down in my pumpkin patch with my name tattooed across his chest?"

"What?" I asked sharply, but the word felt hollow, my stomach already tightening.

She gestured toward me, and I followed her gaze. My chest felt heavy, an unnatural warmth prickling over my skin.

And then I saw it.

There, etched across my chest in dark, bold script, was the name *Skyler* .

For a moment, my mind blanked. The air felt too thin, the world unnaturally quiet.

Then rage surged through me, hot and unrelenting, roaring in my veins.

How *dare* her magic mark me.

I was no mortal's plaything, no common beast to be branded. I had survived millennia unbound, untouched by mortal hands. Yet now, here I stood, her name seared into my flesh like some grotesque signature of ownership.

My hands clenched at my sides, trembling with fury. I wanted to tear the mark away, to rip her magic from my skin, to remind her exactly what she'd dared to claim.

But beneath the rage, something colder crept in.

Fear.

Her magic had done this. Her wild, unrefined magic had overwhelmed mine. This wasn't some harmless parlor trick from an inexperienced witch. This was power. Raw, untamed, and disturbingly potent.

She had *brought* me here—wrenched me from Hell like a fish from water, branded me, and now that magic pulsed faintly in the air between us, a tether I hadn't agreed to.

I shoved the fear down deep, burying it where it couldn't grow roots. Fear was useless. Fear was mortal. And I wasn't mortal.

Her voice broke through the haze, quieter now, cautious but steady.

"Where are you from?"

The question, so simple yet heavy with meaning, cut through me. I met her gaze, her bright blue eyes filled with a mix of suspicion and wariness.

"Hell," I replied evenly, the word dropping like a stone between us.

Her face changed instantly. The flicker of curiosity vanished, replaced by fear. She stepped back, her breath quickening, her pallor stark against the fiery backdrop of her hair.

"Are you a lost soul?" she asked, her voice a whisper.

I didn't break her gaze. "No," I said calmly. "I'm a demon."

The fear in her eyes shifted, hardening into something fiercer—anger. Defiance.

"Leave," she said, her voice low and trembling with fury. "Now."

The command hit me like a physical blow, the weight of it settling over me like iron chains.

I opened my mouth to retort, to laugh at her audacity, to remind her of the difference between us. But the words didn't come.

Instead, my body moved against my will. My magic flared weakly, a fleeting resistance, but it was no use.

Her magic—raw, infuriatingly potent—compelled me.

I shimmered out of sight, rage boiling in my chest, unable to fight the pull of her command.

The humiliation burned.

I should have been furious. I *was* furious. How dare she—how *dare* she command me? A mortal girl with no training, no control, no understanding of what she'd done—yet somehow, she had managed to do what no mortal had done before.

And yet...

Her wild red hair and fierce green eyes filled my mind, their image burned into me like the brand she'd left on my chest.

I dragged a hand over my face. I was going to kill Loki when I found him.

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Chapter 6

::Chapter Five::

Skyler

I stared at the human-shaped indent in the pumpkin patch. Just moments ago, the demon had been lying there—arrogant, naked, and impossibly smug—and then he'd dissolved into nothingness, leaving me with more questions than answers.

How did I manage to summon a demon? And more importantly, how did I send him back?

The wind whispered through the garden, shaking the brittle leaves above me. I shivered, crossing my arms over myself, wondering if I'd ever see him again—and if I even wanted to.

Behind me, I heard Grandma's footsteps crunching against the autumn leaves. She came hobbling down the garden path with all the enthusiasm of a woman half her age.

"Where is he?" she demanded, her gaze sweeping the garden with laser focus, like a heat-seeking missile in a fur hat.

"He left," I said quietly, not taking my eyes off the patch of dirt.

Her shoulders sagged dramatically, and she threw her hands toward the sky in frustration. "Damn my vanity! I wasted precious minutes in the bathroom putting in my false teeth before grabbing the camera. Do you know, I've not seen a naked man's bottom in the flesh since ninety-two?"

Sometimes I wondered how we were even related.

"I was in New Orleans with Mavis for Mardi Gras," she added, with a nostalgic sigh. "Oh boy, did we get some beads."

"Grandma," I groaned, burying my face in my hands.

She ignored me completely, inching closer with a conspiratorial glint in her eye. "So? What did you think of him? Handsome? Did he give you butterflies in your stomach?"

"There is something *wrong* with you," I muttered.

Grandma shrugged, entirely unapologetic. "I just need to know if he was a looker."

"I guess," I said reluctantly, not wanting to give too much away.

The truth was, I couldn't stop thinking about him—not because of his sharp jawline or his stupidly perfect abs, but because he was a *demon* . A demon with my name tattooed across his chest.

Grandma misinterpreted my silence as bashfulness. She patted my shoulder with a knowing smile. "It's

alright, girl. This one may have gotten away, but there'll be plenty more opportunities to meet fellas like him."

"I hope not," I muttered under my breath.

We returned to the cabin in an awkward silence, and I spent the rest of the morning buried in our family's collection of spell tomes and grimoires. I flipped through page after page, but there was nothing. No mention of demons, no spells to banish them, no clue how I had managed to summon one in the first place.

Our books were the work of hedge witches—grounded in nature, not Hell. They were filled with recipes for herbal salves, charms, and guidance on how to appease forest spirits. None of them had a single word about summoning infernal beings or what to do once they were standing naked in your pumpkin patch.

By lunchtime, my frustration was boiling over, and Grandma announced it was time to head into town.

The drive was uneventful, save for the usual symphony of creaks and groans from Grandma's

ancient VW Beetle. She swore she couldn't hear the rattling, but I could feel it in my bones. As we wound through the misty forest, I stared out at the towering pines, half-expecting Rayne to materialise from the shadows.

When we arrived, the usual stares and whispers greeted us. Grandma soaked it all in, parading down the street with the confidence of someone who hadn't been the subject of town gossip for decades. Her oversized fur hat and golden pyramid pendant swayed with every exaggerated step.

"I'll be an hour. I need to get my eyes tested and speak to Marge," she announced with a wink. "Why don't you hit the bars and see if you can find your young man?"

"I'm going to the bookshop," I replied flatly, already walking in the opposite direction.

Grandma sighed dramatically. "A man is not going to fall out the sky into your lap, Skyler," she muttered, loud enough for half the street to hear, before turning on her heel and heading toward the general store.

Oh, if only she knew...

The local bookshop was small but comforting, its shelves crammed with dusty hardcovers and faded paperbacks. I placed an order for books on summoning demons and black magic, doing my best to keep my voice casual. The shopkeeper, thankfully, didn't ask any questions.

"The books should arrive in a few days," she said with a polite smile as she wrote down my request.

"Thanks," I replied, already wondering how I was going to survive until then.

As I stepped out of the shop, the cool afternoon air prickling my skin, the sound of laughter drew my attention. A group of men stood outside a bar across the street, their voices loud and grating. They were staring at me, their smirks wide as they whispered to each other.

My stomach tightened. I lowered my gaze and hurried down the street, pretending I hadn't noticed them.

The laughter followed me, closer now, and the sound of heavy footsteps made my heart sink. I quickened my pace, but before I could escape, a rough hand yanked at my cloak.

A burst of wild laughter erupted behind me.

"Leave me alone," I said, spinning to face them. They stood around me in a half circle, stinking of alcohol and stale cigarette smoke.

"Or what, Wednesday Addams?" A man in the red plaid shirt sneered at me.

"I'll call the police," I said, taking a step back.

"You're not going to the police," Red Shirt replied, grabbing my arm with a bruising grip. "You're coming with us."

Before I could scream, he dragged me into a narrow alley, his friends following close behind like a pack of wolves scenting blood. I thrashed against his grip, but his strength far outweighed mine.

He shoved me hard against the brick wall, the rough surface scraping my back through my shirt. My cloak

was ripped from my shoulders and discarded carelessly on the filthy ground.

"Let me see what's under that cloak," he panted, his breath hot and sour against my face as he pressed his body against mine.

"Get off me!" I screamed, but my voice cracked with panic.

The slap came fast, his hand clamping down over my mouth with brutal force.

"Play nice, sugar, and I won't hurt you," he growled, his tone low and dangerous.

My heart thundered in my chest, drowning out the sound of his friends jeering behind him. Terror froze me in place, locking my limbs and stealing the breath from my lungs. My mind screamed at me to fight back, to do something, but my body refused to move.

I squeezed my eyes shut, bracing myself for the inevitable.

A cool breeze swept across my face, carrying with it a deep, dark voice, rich with disdain.

"Gentlemen," it purred, "please excuse us."

My eyes snapped open. It was Rayne.

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Chapter 7

::Chapter Six::

Skyler

Rayne stood between me and the men, in a black tailored suit immaculate despite the grime and filth of the alley. His pale skin seemed almost luminous in the dull autumn light, a stark contrast to the shadows pooling around him. His sharp features were

composed, unnervingly calm, but his grey eyes told another story. They blazed with a quiet, simmering fury that made the hairs on the back of my neck rise.

There was a grace to the way he stood—elegant, controlled—but it wasn't the elegance of a gentleman. It was the lethal elegance of a predator poised to strike.

His gaze flicked to me, and I froze.

The weight of his irritation settled over me, sharp and tangible, like a scolding I wasn't entirely sure I didn't deserve.

"The cavalry has arrived," he sighed, his tone dripping with sarcasm, as though this entire ordeal was an annoying inconvenience.

Something inside me twisted. He wasn't here out of kindness or concern; that much was clear. But he *was* here. And despite the bite in his words, the relief that washed over me was so overwhelming, I felt dizzy with it.

Before I could say anything, his arm looped around my waist in one fluid motion. His touch was firm,

unyielding, and it sent a jolt through me that was equal parts indignation and something else I didn't dare examine.

"Wait—" I started, but my protest was swallowed by the air as we shot upward.

The world blurred, a rush of wind and light stealing the breath from my lungs. A scream caught in my throat, too overwhelmed by the sheer impossibility of what was happening.

Then, as suddenly as it had begun, we landed softly. My feet touched solid ground—well, rooftop—and my legs buckled slightly beneath me. I staggered backward, gripping the ledge for balance as my heart thundered in my chest.

Rayne released me, but not immediately. His hand lingered just a second, his grip steady and warm, as though some part of him wasn't quite ready to let go—or wasn't sure he should.

His gaze flicked over me, sharp and assessing. For a moment, he didn't move, his grey eyes narrowing as they trailed down the length of me, searching.

"Are you hurt?" he asked, his voice low but carrying an edge I couldn't quite place.

"I'm fine," I said quickly, but my voice betrayed me, shaky and uneven.

He didn't seem convinced. His gaze swept back up, and then it stopped—fixed on something.

"What—" I started, but before I could finish, his hand rose, his thumb brushing gently across my cheek.

The world seemed to pause, the cool rooftop air disappearing under the warmth of his touch.

I blinked, my breath catching in my throat.

There was nothing soft about Rayne. His presence was sharp and commanding, his movements precise and deliberate. And yet, in that moment, his touch was impossibly tender, his thumb sweeping lightly over the faint mark Red Shirt had left on my skin.

The fury in his eyes was quiet but unmistakable, simmering beneath his carefully controlled expression.

"It's nothing," I managed, trying to break the silence, but the words sounded hollow even to me.

His gaze lingered for a beat too long, his thumb still resting against my cheek as though erasing the mark wasn't enough. As though he wanted to remove the memory of it entirely.

Then, just as quickly as it had happened, his hand dropped, his expression smoothing back into indifference.

"Stay here while I deal with the idiots," he said, his voice calm and detached.

I opened my mouth to argue—Why? What are you going to do?—but the words died on my lips as he turned away.

He stepped off the edge of the roof without hesitation.

I rushed to the ledge, my hands trembling as I peered down.

Rayne landed silently in the alley below, his polished shoes barely making a sound against the pavement.

The men gawked at him, their drunken bravado faltering as they tried to process what they had just seen.

"How'd you do that?" one of them stammered, his voice tinged with fear.

Rayne tilted his head slightly, his expression unreadable, his voice dark and reprimanding. "Now, that would be telling."

Red Shirt stepped forward, trying to reclaim his position as leader. His sneer was shaky at best. "There's one of you and all of us." He gestured to his friends, who were clearly uneasy but still trying to look tough.

Rayne let out a soft laugh, low and sharp, like the sound of a blade being unsheathed. "Then let's even the odds," he said, raising a hand.

He snapped his fingers.

The sound cracked through the alley, unnatural and jarring. The men behind Red Shirt crumpled to the ground, their bodies slack and unmoving, as though their strings had been cut.

Red Shirt stumbled back, his eyes darting to his unconscious friends. His earlier confidence drained from his face, leaving only panic.

"L-look, man—I don't want trouble—"

"Then you shouldn't have touched her," Rayne interrupted, his tone colder than the autumn wind.

Before Red Shirt could react, Rayne moved. One moment he was standing still, the next his hand was clamped around the man's throat.

Red Shirt gasped, his boots scraping against the ground as Rayne lifted him off his feet with no more effort than one might swat a fly.

Rayne's expression remained calm, almost bored, but his grey eyes burned with a chilling intensity. He leaned in closer, his voice dropping to a deadly whisper.

"I should send you to my brother," he murmured, his words deliberate, cruel. "He handles men who can't keep their hands to themselves. I'd even ensure you got... special treatment for daring to touch-"

His gaze flicked back toward me, searching for the right words. Then his lips curved into a faint smirk.

"My pet," he finished.

My stomach flipped. *Pet?*

Rayne drew back his fist, the motion slow and deliberate, as though he were savoring the moment before the strike.

My heart seized.

He was going to kill him. One swift punch, and the man's chest would cave in. I had no doubt. Rayne was powerful enough to make it quick, and judging by the icy calm in his expression, he wouldn't lose a wink of sleep over it.

But I would.

The thought hit me like a punch to the gut.

I didn't care about Red Shirt. Not after what he'd done, what he'd tried to do. He deserved to face consequences—terrible ones. But not like this. Not at the hands of a demon bound to me.

The witches' creed whispered in my mind, steady and insistent: *Do no harm.*

My magic was tied to my intent, to the choices I made. If I let Rayne kill this man, his death would leave a stain—a crack in the foundation of everything I believed in. Every spell I cast, every charm I created, would carry the shadow of this moment.

I wasn't like Rayne. I didn't want to be.

This isn't who I am.

Rayne's fist drew back farther, his grey eyes burning with a quiet fury.

"STOP!" I ordered, my voice cutting through the night like a whip.

He froze mid-motion, his muscles taut, his jaw tightening. For a moment, I thought he might defy me, his fury too strong to leash. But slowly, he lowered his fist, his hand unclenching with deliberate precision.

Red Shirt stumbled backward, clutching his throat as he gasped for air. He didn't wait for an invitation to leave, bolting from the alley without so much as a glance back at his unconscious friends.

Rayne adjusted his cuffs, his expression once again calm and composed, as if nothing had happened. He turned his gaze upward, his grey eyes locking with mine.

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Chapter 8

::Chapter Seven::

Rayne

I stared at the little witch. She had spared the man. And for what?

He would get drunk again. He would find another woman. He would repeat the same despicable behavior, over and over, until someone somewhere stopped him—which rarely happened. Humans were

creatures of patterns, no matter how vile. Society was so quick to gloss over this kind of behavior, to excuse it or simply look the other way.

I had offered her justice—swift and absolute—but she had chosen mercy.

I vaulted to the rooftop, landing in a crouch, my movements silent as a shadow. She was there, trembling and wide-eyed, the chill of the autumn evening clinging to her like a second skin.

I had seen fear on countless faces before, but something about hers struck a discordant note inside me. Her fear wasn't for herself—it wasn't the fear of a victim. No, it was fear of *me.*

I didn't like it.

My poor little pet.

I wove my fingers through the air, summoning my jacket. With a flick of my wrist, I tossed it to her. "Put this on. Your teeth chattering is giving me a migraine."

She stared at the garment as if it were cursed. The mistrust in her eyes stung more than it should have. After all, I had just saved her, hadn't I?

"It's Armani," I groaned. "It won't kill you."

Finally, she took it, wrapping it tightly around herself. I considered summoning a fur coat or whisking us away to somewhere warmer, but the hesitation in her movements—like a bird poised to flee—made me think better of it. Perhaps I needed to start small.

"Are you alright?" I asked, the words coming out sharper than I intended.

There was still a red mark on her face which irritated me. I could kill a man, but I couldn't heal him - which meant I couldn't heal her.

She didn't answer right away, her gaze darting from me to the edge of the roof as if weighing her escape routes. "You were going to kill that man," she said at last, her voice raw and thready.

Her words were an accusation, a reminder of what I was. I felt my lips curl into the faintest sneer. "He was

about to defile you, little witch," I said, irritation threading into my tone. "I wasn't about to let that happen."

Her expression softened for a fraction of a second before her shoulders stiffened again, her blue eyes narrowing. "It's funny," she murmured, almost to herself. "I didn't think a demon would disapprove of such things."

I arched an eyebrow, folding my arms across my chest. "Oh, on the contrary. It is our business to punish the wicked for their evil deeds—and that one will pay. Do not think for a moment he is free of his crime."

A flicker of dark satisfaction curling in my chest as I thought of my younger brother, Axl, who would welcome the man's soul into his dominion. I would see to it personally that the punishment he escaped tonight would be waiting for him in death.

"Rayne," she said hesitantly, her voice unsure. "Why did you save me?"

The question struck harder than it should have. I clenched my fists, forcing the dark thoughts to dissipate, and plastered on an easy smile. "It suited me."

Her brows knit together in confusion.

I sighed, closing the space between us. "You are important to me," I explained carefully. "And as such, you need to be protected."

"Important?" she repeated, her tone suspicious.

"We are bonded," I said again, more firmly this time, holding her gaze. "Your magic has tied me to you, and while it allows me to remain here, it also... benefits you."

Skyler raised an eyebrow, crossing her arms. "Benefits me? In what way?"

I sighed, suppressing the flicker of irritation that her skepticism always seemed to stir. "You're tethered to a demon, little witch. That means protection, power, and influence that few could dream of. You might not understand what you've done, but the bond between us is... significant."

Her eyes narrowed, her suspicion unwavering. "Significant how?"

I took a measured step closer, allowing my voice to drop, smooth and coaxing. "Do you realize what that kind of connection can offer you? With me at your side, no one would dare harm you. The kind of power I can grant you... mortals would kill for it."

I lifted a hand and snapped my fingers. A shimmer of light flickered in the air, and when it cleared, a diamond necklace glimmered in my palm. It sparkled, cold and brilliant, the kind of trinket mortals couldn't resist.

"This," I said, holding it up, "is only the beginning. Wealth, power, influence—I can give you anything you want."

I held the necklace out to her, expecting her awe, her hesitation, perhaps even a glimmer of greed. It was how mortals always reacted when they caught a glimpse of what they could gain.

But Skyler simply stared at it, her brows furrowing slightly. Then, to my utter astonishment, she shook her head.

"No, thank you," she said softly.

I blinked, thrown off balance. "What?"

"I don't want diamonds," she said, her voice steady. "They're... pretty, I guess. But they're cold, lifeless."

My grip tightened around the necklace, the sharp edges biting into my palm. "Then what would you want?" I asked, unable to keep the faint edge of frustration from creeping into my tone.

Skyler tilted her head, considering me for a moment, her gaze far too knowing. "Flowers," she said finally. "I'd rather have flowers in my hair than diamonds around my neck."

The simplicity of her answer hit me like a punch to the gut. Flowers. She wanted *flowers.*

I stared at her, my thoughts scrambling for purchase. Mortals were supposed to be predictable, driven by their desires for wealth, beauty, power—things I

could grant with a flick of my wrist. But Skyler didn't fit into any of those tidy little categories. She was...

Different.

And I hadn't accounted for that.

"You'd trade diamonds for *flowers* ?" I asked, my voice sharper than I intended.

Her lips curved into a faint smile, and she shrugged. "Diamonds are just rocks. Flowers are alive. They mean something."

I opened my mouth, then closed it, the words refusing to come. This girl, this perplexing, infuriating girl, had just tossed aside what most mortals would kill for without a second thought.

"I'm offering you power," I said finally, my voice low and insistent. "Protection. Things that *matter.* "

"Those things might matter to you," she replied evenly, meeting my gaze with quiet defiance. "But I don't need them."

My temper flared, hot and immediate, but I forced it down, smoothing my expression into something neutral.

"You don't understand what you've tied yourself to," I said, my tone softer now, almost coaxing. "The bond between us—it isn't something you can undo on a whim. You've invited me into your life, whether you meant to or not, and that comes with consequences."

"Like having you boss me around?" she shot back, her voice laced with sarcasm.

"No," I said sharply, stepping closer, my eyes narrowing. "Like having me protect you from things that would tear you apart without hesitation. Like having someone to guard you, to keep you alive. Whether you want to admit it or not, you *need* me."

Her expression softened, just slightly, but there was still that spark of resistance in her eyes. "And what do you need, Rayne?"

The question caught me off guard, and I faltered. What did I need? Her compliance? Her trust? The

simplicity of using her as a tether without complication?

I forced a smirk, trying to mask the unease that twisted in my chest. "It doesn't matter what I need. You've already given me what I require: a place in this realm. I'm here, and for now, you're stuck with me."

She frowned, studying me as though she were trying to peel back the layers I'd worked so hard to construct. I didn't like it.

"I don't trust you," she said finally, her voice steady.

"And I don't require your trust," I replied coolly. "Only your obedience."

Her eyes flashed, and for a moment, I thought she might command me again, might try to test the boundaries of the bond. Instead, she turned away, shaking her head.

"I don't know what I've gotten myself into," she muttered, more to herself than to me.

I watched her retreat, the diamond necklace still clutched in my hand, its cold brilliance suddenly feeling... wrong.

Flowers over diamonds.

She was nothing like the humans I was used to. And that, I realised, might be more dangerous than anything else.

Chapter 9

::Chapter Eight::

Skyler

I climbed down the fire escape, the rickety metal groaning beneath my boots as I descended into the alley below. The cool air nipped at my cheeks, but it did little to cool the storm raging in my mind.

What did it mean to be tied to a demon?

Would I be sentenced to eternal damnation, my soul dragged down to Hell when my time came? Or worse—would Rayne consume my soul entirely, erasing me from existence like a flame snuffed out by his will?

The thought sent a shiver down my spine.

As my boots hit the damp alley ground, Rayne materialized beside me, his movements as fluid and deliberate as smoke. His expression was guarded, his sharp features unreadable, though the faint air of smugness never seemed to leave him entirely.

"I need to meet up with my Grandma," I said, waving him off like a stray cat. "Can you go... be somewhere else right now?"

His lips parted, and for a moment, he looked appalled, as though I'd suggested he roll in the mud. But then he relented, dipping into a courtly bow, his movements exaggerated and dripping with sarcasm.

"As you wish," he drawled, disappearing into thin air.

I let out a breath I hadn't realized I was holding. He couldn't stay.

I needed to figure out how to get rid of him.

But how?

Exorcising a demon wasn't exactly in the family playbook. Our spells were for blessings, harvests, and the occasional herbal charm—not for banishing creatures of Hell. And hiring a real exorcist? That would bankrupt me a thousand times over, assuming I could even find one.

Could I exorcise myself? Was that even possible? I wasn't sure. But the thought of spending every waking moment tied to a demon—especially one like Rayne—was unbearable.

Traditional employment suddenly loomed on the horizon like a dark, stormy cloud. Maybe I'd have to get a full-time job to save up for an exorcist or learn how to banish him myself. But the thought of slaving away for minimum wage, disconnected from the forest and the life I'd always known, was its own brand of torture.

God, I was going to kill Grandma for giving me the wrong stupid spell.

Pushing the thoughts aside, I stepped out onto the street just as Grandma emerged from the optician's. Her new glasses perched precariously on her nose, their lenses thick as milk bottles.

She spotted me and waved cheerily, the rain glinting off the glass like tiny stars.

"New glasses," she announced, "and bad news."

I raised an eyebrow. "Bad news?"

"That old quack of an eye doctor says I'm as blind as a wombat with no eyes."

"Okay..." I prompted.

"And these glasses will help a little," she continued, "but not enough to drive the car."

I froze. "What do you mean, not enough to drive the car?"

"I'm banned from driving," she said, her tone far too casual for someone dropping such a bombshell.

As if on cue, the heavens opened, and a deluge of rain hammered down with unrelenting force.

"What?!" I cried, my voice nearly drowned out by the storm. "How are we going to get back?"

Grandma winced, then pointed directly at me. "Well, you can see, can't you?"

"Yes, but I can't drive!"

"Then we're stuck here," she said with a dramatic shrug, but her eyes flicked over my shoulder, and her expression shifted.

I didn't need to turn around to know he was there.

"I can drive," came Rayne's voice, smooth and cool.

"Rayne." His name slipped off my tongue before I could stop it. I turned to face him, his silver hair glistening under the rain and an umbrella in hand, held over my head. His grey eyes met mine, calm yet oddly piercing.

Casually, his arm brushed against mine, and for a fleeting moment, I wished he was just a normal man—a human with nothing but good intentions.

"You are not insured to drive my grandmother's car, Rayne," I said firmly, trying to inject some authority into my voice.

Cutting across the tension, Grandma interjected with a laugh. "Oh, I've been driving without insurance for the last twenty years."

"What?!" I snapped, whipping around to face her. "You've been driving without insurance? Grandma, that's illegal! What if someone hit us?"

"No one's going to hit us," she said, waving off my concern. "I've got a charm in the trunk for that—Granny's secret recipe." She winked at Rayne, who looked vaguely amused.

"Is *that* what those weird brown clumps of mould are in the back?" I demanded, my voice rising.

"Don't question the magic, duck," she replied, patting my shoulder. "Now, if this gorgeous young man wants to drive, I say we let him. What's the harm?"

I stared at her, dumbfounded, before turning back to Rayne, who was watching the exchange with thinly veiled amusement.

"You're not driving," I said flatly.

"Then you'll be walking," he replied, his tone infuriatingly calm. He stepped closer, the umbrella still shielding me from the rain, as his grey eyes met mine once more. "I suggest you reconsider, little witch."

Grandma clapped her hands. "You can even stay for dinner!"

Oh God. My Grandma was inviting the demon to dinner. This was *not* good.

Grabbing Rayne's free arm, I pulled him away from the car. "Rayne's pretty busy, Grandma," I said quickly, my voice rising in panic.

Rayne smirked. "No, I'm not."

Grandma's face lit up. "See! It'll be lovely to have Skyler's friend over for dinner!"

"He's not my friend!" I yelled, glaring at him.

Without warning, Rayne slid an arm around my waist, pulling me closer. "I thought you weren't going

to wait to tell your Grandma about us," he said smoothly, his voice dripping with mock sincerity.

My jaw hit the floor. "What?"

Grandma's eyes sparkled with delight. "Were you the naked young man in my front garden?"

Rayne leaned conspiratorially toward her, feigning shyness. "I swore Skyler to secrecy."

" *That's not true!* " I yelled, smacking his arm, my face burning with humiliation.

Grandma laughed, clearly enjoying this far too much. "They always say it's the quiet ones you have to look out for."

Before I could protest further, Grandma handed Rayne the car keys. He accepted them with a triumphant smile, flashing it in my direction.

I swear it might have been funny—if he didn't want my soul.

I could only watch in horror as Rayne unlocked the car and opened the rear passenger door for my

Grandma. She beamed, thoroughly charmed by his gentlemanly manners, and got in without hesitation.

"Such a polite young man," she said, settling into her seat.

Rayne shut the door with a flourish and turned to me, his expression practically glowing with smug victory. Begrudgingly, I trudged toward the car and slid into the front passenger seat, hoping the faded leather would somehow swallow me whole.

Rayne climbed into the driver's seat, and as he adjusted it, Grandma whispered loudly from the back, "He's got a tush like a peach!"

I groaned, slinking further into my seat, mortified.

Rayne's lips quirked up in a knowing smirk as he started the car. The engine sputtered and coughed like it always did, and he frowned.

"That's normal," I said with a sigh.

The sputtering finally settled, and Rayne slammed his foot on the accelerator, sending the car lurching

forward. We shot out of the parking lot like a bat out of Hell, the town vanishing behind us in a blur.

"I never thought the old girl could go this fast!" Grandma laughed, clapping her hands in delight.

Rayne, ever the picture of calm, glanced at me. "I'll have a look at the engine when we get home," he said, his tone smooth, his smile so fake it could have come with a warning label.

I narrowed my eyes at him. It was the kind of smile you'd expect from a James Bond villain just before revealing their nefarious plan. And here I was, stuck in his trap, trying desperately to figure out an escape route.

Rain streaked the windows as the scenery changed from quaint fields and farms to the shadowy expanse of the forest. Grandma had thankfully fallen asleep, sparing me more of her embarrassing commentary.

Finally, as we neared the welcome sign to the forest, I couldn't take the silence anymore. Checking over my shoulder to make sure Grandma was still out cold, I

turned to Rayne and asked quietly, "Why did you tell my Grandma those lies?"

"Lies?" he replied smoothly, his tone infuriatingly casual. "Partial exaggerated truths, perhaps, but never lies."

I glared at him. "None of it was true! It was all baloney!"

Rayne's smirk deepened as he glanced at me, his grey eyes practically gleaming with mischief. "Skyler, I'm tied to you for eternity. Where you go, I follow. Telling your dear grandmother a few... adjustments to the truth makes it easier for me to live in your home."

I stared at him, my jaw dropping in disbelief. "I do not want you living in my home."

He raised an eyebrow, his expression cool and unbothered. "I'm not sleeping outside," he replied, as if the very idea was absurd.

"Well, you're not sleeping in my bedroom either!" I snapped, my voice rising.

His wicked smirk spread further. "I wasn't planning to," he said, the low murmur of his voice laced with mockery.

For a moment, I just gaped at him, utterly flustered. My mouth opened, ready to fire back a retort, but no words came. Finally, I snapped it shut, clenching my hands into fists as I turned toward the window, my finger tracing the rain streaks as frustration simmered inside me.

"No way are you coming inside the house," I said, refusing to look at him. "You can sleep... on the roof."

"The *roof* ?" he repeated, his voice dripping with disbelief. "What do you think I am, a gargoyle?"

I turned back to him, my eyes narrowing. "You're not far off."

Rayne let out a low chuckle, the sound sending an infuriating shiver down my spine. "You'd have me perched in the rain, brooding over your precious forest like some gothic ornament? You wound me, little witch."

"Good," I shot back. "If you're so tied to me, you can be tied *outside* . The bond doesn't mean you have to be in my house."

"I beg to differ," he said smoothly, leaning back in his seat with infuriating nonchalance. "We're bonded, remember? The closer I am to you, the better the bond functions. I should be sleeping in your room."

"Absolutely not!" I said, my voice sharp enough to make him arch an eyebrow.

"Then how do you suggest this arrangement works, hmm?" he asked, his tone light but cutting. "I can't very well sleep in your vegetable patch or cuddle up with the pumpkins."

"You can sleep anywhere that's *not* inside," I countered. "I don't care if you pitch a tent in the woods or curl up in the shed."

"The shed?" He let out a disbelieving laugh. "With the spiders and the rusting tools? I don't think so."

"Fine," I said, throwing my hands in the air. "Sleep in the car. You already seem so comfortable driving it like a maniac."

He leaned closer, his grey eyes locking onto mine. "Or," he drawled, "you could let me have the bed, and you sleep on the floor."

I blinked, stunned by his audacity. "What? Are you insane?"

He shrugged. "It's a logical solution. I'm your guest, after all."

"You're not a guest!" I hissed. "You're... you're an *intrusion* !"

"And yet, here I am," he said, spreading his hands in mock magnanimity. "Might as well make the best of it."

"The best of it," I repeated, my voice rising in exasperation. "You don't get to make the best of it! You're a demon, Rayne! You don't belong in my house—or my life!"

His smirk faltered for just a second, and his gaze flickered with something almost unreadable. Then, just as quickly, the mask returned. "Like it or not, little witch, we're bound. If you want to fight this

every step of the way, that's your choice. But I'm not sleeping on the roof."

I groaned, burying my face in my hands. "I'll figure out how to break this bond. And when I do, you're out of here."

"Until then," he said, his voice soft but firm, "you're stuck with me."

I glanced back at him, meeting his steady, infuriating gaze. My stomach twisted with frustration—and something else I refused to name.

This demon was going to drive me insane.

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Chapter 10

::Chapter Nine::

Skyler

After dinner, I trudged toward the ladder to my attic room, ready to collapse into bed. Rayne, true to his word, had begrudgingly agreed to sleep on the couch. It felt like the only battle I'd won today.

As I passed him, his hand shot out, catching my wrist.

"A quick word, please," Rayne said, his tone even, though there was a flicker of something unreadable in his grey eyes.

I stopped, glancing down at his hand encircling mine. His fingers were long, strong, and cool against my skin—capable of snapping my wrist with ease, yet his grip was oddly gentle.

"What?" I asked, keeping my voice wary.

"As I am your..." he paused, his jaw tightening, the words sticking in his throat like a bitter pill, "your *familiar* ." He said the word as though it physically pained him.

I raised an eyebrow.

He inhaled sharply, his muscles taut with barely concealed frustration. "I am reliant on your energy for sustenance."

I furrowed my brows, confused. In the old tales, a witch fed her familiar, sure—but I'd assumed that meant food, not energy.

"I'll need the occasional, brief moment of contact with you," he continued, his voice steady but clipped. "To... replenish myself."

Replenish?

I stared down at him, at his hand still wrapped around my wrist. "So you're like a parasite? Leeching off my aura?"

His expression flattened, the faintest twitch of irritation crossing his face. "No, *not* like a parasite. Like a..." He paused again, visibly struggling with the word. "Like a *familiar* . This is the bond we agreed to—your energy, in exchange for my power."

"I didn't agree to this bond," I snapped, yanking my hand free. "I was *tricked* ."

"Perhaps," he said coolly, though a flicker of something—was it guilt?—flashed in his eyes. "But the bond has been forged. And I need to eat."

"Then you'll have to starve," I said, crossing my arms. "I'm not giving you a drop of my energy."

His eyes darkened, the stormy grey swirling with something almost vulnerable.

"I saved you," he said, his voice low but sharp, cutting through the quiet. "I used my magic to help you, and you can't even spare me a crumb of energy."

A knot twisted deep in my gut, guilt and mistrust waging war within me. He *had* saved me—that much was true—but he was still a demon. Demons didn't help without wanting something in return, and I had no idea what Rayne truly wanted.

His gaze softened, the hard edges melting into something that felt dangerously close to pleading. His grey eyes met mine, unflinching, making me doubt myself.

But I couldn't let him get to me. Not like this.

I shook my head and stepped back, pulling away from his outstretched hand. "Goodnight, Rayne. Enjoy sleeping on the couch," I said, my voice quiet but firm.

"A hungry demon is not a happy demon, little witch," he called after me, his tone carrying a hint of

warning, a promise of what might happen if I denied him.

I didn't reply. I climbed the ladder to my attic room, pulling the trapdoor shut behind me with more force than necessary. In the silence that followed, my pulse thundered in my ears, loud and erratic.

What was I going to do?

I leaned against the closed trapdoor, my arms crossed tightly over my chest. The idea of being tied to a demon made my skin crawl, and every instinct I had screamed that I needed to break this bond—soon.

I paced the small space, my steps echoing as the wooden boards creaked underfoot. My fingers itched to flip through the pages of every grimoire and spellbook we owned, but I already knew they wouldn't hold the answers I needed. My only hope was the books I'd ordered. Books on exorcisms and dark magic.

I needed them to arrive *now* .

What did it mean to be bonded to a demon? Would it corrupt me? Drag me into Hell when I died? Or was

there something worse—something Rayne hadn't told me?

I paused, my breath catching. What if the bond wasn't just for his survival in this realm? What if he had darker intentions?

The memory of the diamond necklace he'd conjured flashed in my mind. It glittered with impossible beauty, and yet, it had felt like a bribe. A way to lower my defenses, to manipulate me into trusting him.

I couldn't trust him.

He'd said he needed the bond to stay in this realm, but he hadn't explained why. What was he doing here? Was he collecting souls for the Devil? Carrying out Hell's work?

My stomach churned as my thoughts spiraled. I dropped onto the edge of my bed, curling my hands into fists against the mattress.

I rolled over and buried my face in the pillow, tossing and turning as unease gnawed at me. Sleep didn't

come easily, and when it did, it was broken and haunted by nightmares.

In one, I stood in the alleyway again, the shadows swirling around me. Rayne emerged, his eyes glowing like embers, the diamond necklace draped across his palm like a noose. "Take it," he whispered, his voice smooth as silk.

I woke with a start, sweat clinging to my skin and my breath coming in short gasps. The early light of dawn filtered through the cracks in the window shutters, and I groaned, aching and exhausted.

I trudged downstairs, the scent of breakfast filled the air. My stomach growled, but my mood soured instantly at the sight before me.

Grandma was at the stove, cheerfully humming as she flipped pancakes. And Rayne? Rayne was lingering near the mirror by the front door, fussing with his hair like some vain aristocrat.

He looked utterly out of place in our little cabin, his sharp, tailored aesthetic clashing with the rustic

warmth of the wooden walls and hand-sewn curtains.

He'd swapped his suit jacket for a sleek shirt and waistcoat, the dark fabric fitting him so perfectly it looked custom-made. His hair, a silvery cascade, glinted under the morning light as he adjusted the strands with meticulous care.

When he noticed me standing there, his movements paused. His eyes flicked over me, taking in my rumpled hair and tired expression.

"You look terrible, my pet," he said, his tone deceptively pleasant. "Did you have trouble sleeping?"

I glared at him, feeling his question dig under my skin. He *knew* I hadn't slept well.

"Never mind," he continued, waving a hand dismissively. "Aggy is making us breakfast. You'll feel better after a few pancakes and perhaps... two cups of coffee."

"Great," I muttered. "You're on a first-name basis with my grandmother now?"

"She's delightful," Rayne said with a grin that was both charming and infuriating. "I can see where you get it from."

Before I could retort, Grandma called out that breakfast was ready.

Rayne was at my side in an instant, his hand brushing lightly against the small of my back. "Shall we?" he asked smoothly, guiding me toward the kitchen.

The casual touch sent a spark of annoyance—and something else I didn't want to acknowledge—skittering through me.

Grandma had gone overboard, as usual. The table was covered in pancakes, eggs, bacon, toast, and enough hash browns to feed an army.

Rayne pulled out my chair with the same practiced grace he applied to everything.

"Such good manners," Grandma said approvingly as I begrudgingly sat down.

Rayne settled into the chair beside me, moving with a deliberate grace that set my teeth on edge. He draped his arm over the back of my chair, the casual gesture far too intimate for my liking.

"My father always believed in excellent manners," he said smoothly, his voice as rich as dark velvet. "He said it was what separated us from the beasts."

I nearly spat out my coffee.

Grandma, ever oblivious, smiled warmly. "He sounds like a wise man, your father."

I swallowed hard, trying to avoid choking. She had no idea Rayne was probably referring to *the Devil* .

As I coughed, clearing my throat, I felt it—a faint, feather-light touch brushing across the nape of my neck.

"Careful, my pet," Rayne murmured, his voice low and dark, the words sinking into the air between us like smoke.

The room seemed to tilt for a moment. My breath hitched, and something coiled tight inside me, an

electric charge sparking in my veins. His thumb lingered, trailing just enough to send my nerves into overdrive.

I froze, caught in his gaze. Those stormy grey eyes pinned me in place, sharp and unrelenting, as though they saw far too much.

Heat curled low in my stomach, a sensation I couldn't quite name or explain. Panic flared as my pulse quickened. What the *hell* was this?

I shot to my feet, nearly knocking the chair over in my haste. Rayne's arm dropped, his smirk growing ever so slightly as he leaned back, watching me like a cat amused by a frantic bird.

"I've just remembered," I said quickly, the words tumbling out as I grabbed a slice of toast and shoved it into my mouth. "I need to... do something. Out in the forest."

Grandma frowned, clearly annoyed by the abruptness, but I didn't wait for her to protest.

Instead, I bolted for the front door, my boots thudding against the floor as I pulled them on with

clumsy urgency. The toast dangled from my mouth as I yanked the door open, letting the crisp morning air bite at my overheated skin.

I needed space. I needed air.

Most of all, I needed to *think* .

Chapter 11

::Chapter Ten::

Rayne

I smiled to myself, watching Skyler's retreating back as she disappeared into the forest. The faint echo of the door slamming behind her made my grin widen. She thought she was escaping me, but she couldn't run from what was already inside her.

I traced my fingers along the back of the chair where she'd been sitting, remembering the way she'd frozen beneath my touch, her cheeks aflame, her pulse hammering in her throat. She'd been utterly transparent—an open book begging to be read.

And I had read her.

She wasn't interested in power. I'd dangled the allure of magic before her, but she hadn't even hesitated to reject it. Wealth? Trinkets? Useless. The diamond necklace had been flat out refused.

But touch? Oh, touch had sent her scrambling like a startled doe.

The faintest brush of my hand against her neck had unravelled her. She'd run from me, cheeks flushed, her breath caught in her chest. She wasn't just untouched—she was untaught. Innocent.

Starved.

She had spent her life hidden away in this cabin, living with that eccentric grandmother of hers, completely detached from the world. She was clever,

yes, and strong in her own way, but she didn't know what it was like to be truly seen.

That was where her weakness lay.

If power and riches couldn't tempt her, then trust could. Attention. Affection. She wanted someone who would make her feel valued, wanted, cherished.

If I could give her that—play the role of the attentive lover—she would let me stay. She would open herself to the bond, willingly.

The thought was elegant in its simplicity. Keep her happy and sated, and she'd be mine, no resistance, no trouble.

And it wouldn't be a chore.

For a mortal, Skyler was... extraordinary. Her defiance, her clever wit, her untamed magic—there was a spark in her that had intrigued me from the start. She was unlike anyone I'd encountered in my millennia of existence, mortal or otherwise.

I dismissed the thought before it could settle.

This wasn't about her.

This was about survival. About staying in this realm, bound to her magic so I could accomplish what I needed to do. It wasn't personal.

And yet, the image of her lingered. The way her bright eyes had flashed with anger, her lips parting to snap at me before she thought better of it. The way her hair, wild and fiery, framed her face as if daring the world to challenge her.

The way her voice had caught, just slightly, when she'd said my name.

Rayne.

I leaned back against the chair, my gaze flicking to the window where the forest loomed beyond the glass.

If I was to play the part, I would have to do it well. She was guarded, suspicious, and she would need to believe in my sincerity. Every smile, every touch, every word—it would have to be perfect.

And I would make it perfect.

Because, though I'd never admit it aloud, the thought of being her lover...

Didn't displease me.

In fact, it intrigued me more than it should.

"Careful," I murmured to myself, straightening my cuffs. "The game is yours to win, Rayne. Don't let her become more than a piece on the board."

Breakfast had been a study in polite distraction. I made small talk with her grandmother, who was endlessly fascinated by my charm and impeccable manners. My gaze, however, kept drifting to the window, where the forest stood tall and untamed, its shadows stretching like fingers toward the cabin.

I could imagine Skyler there, her steps soft against the mossy ground, her fiery hair catching stray beams of sunlight. I could imagine her thoughts, too—no doubt darkened by suspicions of me. *He's a wicked demon. I need to break the bond.*

She'd be working out a plan to be rid of me, of course. But I couldn't allow that.

Excusing myself from the table, I stepped outside. Finding her would be no trouble. The bond tied me to her like a rope, and all I had to do was follow the pull. I shimmered into the shadows, moving unseen through the forest until I spotted her, weaving through the trees with a quiet grace.

The tension that had marred her face earlier was gone now, her features soft and unburdened. She moved as though she belonged here, her steps sure and unhesitant over roots and uneven ground.

She was beautiful here, amongst the wildness.

I materialised a few feet away, stepping lightly onto the moss-covered earth. "Your grandmother puts on a hell of a spread," I said, my voice smooth and low.

Skyler jumped, clutching her chest as she whirled to face me. "How did you find me?"

"Your magic," I purred, my lips curling into a slow smile. "It leads me right to you."

Her eyes narrowed, suspicion flaring as she took a step back, widening the distance between us. I didn't follow, letting the tension between us settle like mist.

"If I'm not welcome, I can return," I offered, feigning retreat. "Your grandmother was quite eager to show me your baby photos."

"It's fine," she said quickly, a flicker of embarrassment in her expression. "You can stay."

Her footsteps stilled, no longer retreating. Victory hummed beneath my skin, but I kept my movements languid, unthreatening, as I moved to her side.

"So this is where you come to get away from it all?" I asked, my tone light.

"I wouldn't say that." Her voice softened, and she turned her attention to the ground, her fingers brushing aside damp leaves to reveal a cluster of grey mushrooms. She plucked them carefully, tucking them into a small bag at her side. "The forest is an extension of my home. For me, this is just like walking from my kitchen to the bedroom."

Her movements were deliberate, reverent, as though she were tending to a garden she loved.

"The forest takes care of me," she continued, her voice dropping to a near whisper. "It's more than a home—it's family."

I bit back the instinctive scoff rising in my throat. *Family?* To me, it was nothing but dirt, trees, and mindless creatures who wouldn't hesitate to eat each other.

But to her, it was something sacred.

I watched as she knelt to gather another cluster of mushrooms, her hands moving with practiced care. Her face, framed by fiery strands of hair, was serene, at peace.

This wasn't just a place to her—it was a sanctuary.

"Family," I echoed softly, the word foreign on my tongue.

She glanced up at me, her expression unreadable, then stood, brushing dirt from her hands. "What's the matter, demon? Never heard of something being more than just itself?"

I tilted my head, studying her. "Perhaps," I said, "I've simply never seen anyone love the forest as much as you do."

"It's not love," she said firmly. "It's respect. The forest gives, and I give back. That's how it works. It's balance."

Balance. The concept felt ridiculous, but I filed the thought away, watching as she turned to continue her path through the trees.

For her, this place was more than mud and roots. It was everything. And if I wanted her to accept me, to let me in, I would have to learn to see it through her eyes.

Even if it meant pretending.

Skyler tilted her head, her gaze drifting to the trees that surrounded us, her voice softening with reverence. "It's not just about how it looks. Each season has its own story, its own rhythm. Autumn is more than gold and orange; it's the gathering, the preparing. The nuts and berries are like nature's

farewell gifts before the storms roll in, washing the land clean for winter."

Her eyes sparkled as she continued, the cadence of her words lulling me despite myself. "When the snow comes, it's not just white—it's a blanket, a quiet promise that life is resting, not gone. Then spring arrives, and everything bursts into renewal, like the world is holding its breath and then—exhales. That first bloom, that first green shoot, it's pure magic."

I opened my mouth to respond, some glib remark on the charm of nature ready on my tongue, but the sincerity in her voice stilled me. She wasn't simply describing the seasons—she was living them, breathing them, carrying their weight and wonder in her every word.

She turned her gaze back to me, her cheeks tinged pink from the cool air. "You see, the seasons aren't just a cycle. They're a lesson. They teach us to let go, to rest, and to begin again."

For a moment, I found myself at a loss for words. Let go. Rest. Begin again. I hadn't thought about life—or

anything—in those terms for longer than I could remember.

The corner of my mouth lifted, my usual smirk failing to find its footing. "Charming philosophy," I murmured, my voice quieter than I intended.

Skyler shrugged, her eyes twinkling with quiet mischief. "It's not philosophy, Rayne. It's just the way things are."

And for once, I had no clever reply.

She turned on her heel, a small triumphant smile flashing in her eyes as she hopped onto a fallen log. The triumph was short-lived. Her foot slipped, and the world seemed to slow. Her arms flailed, desperately grasping for balance, but gravity won the battle.

I saw it all unfold in excruciating detail. The log wobbled, her foot caught an edge, and she tumbled. But it wasn't just the fall that sent my pulse roaring in my ears—it was the low, ominous buzzing rising from within the log. A wasp nest.

Panic shot through me, sharp and sickening. She was about to fall directly onto it.

The world snapped back into focus. Power surged through my veins, sharpening my senses to a razor's edge. I moved without thinking, running toward her with speed I hadn't used in centuries. I caught her just before she hit the ground, hauling her into my arms as though she weighed nothing.

She gasped, clutching at me instinctively, her fingers tangling in my shirt. The buzzing grew louder. My head snapped up, and I saw them—a cloud of angry yellow streaks exploding from the log, the wasps swarming with vicious purpose.

"Hold on," I murmured, tightening my grip on her.

The swarm surrounded us, their wings a deafening hum. I felt her shudder in my arms, her breath hitching as one of the wasps grazed her cheek. Her fear was palpable, pulsing in the air around her like a drumbeat. It stirred something deep and primal within me—a protective instinct I didn't want to examine too closely.

The air around us crackled. A faint glow began to emanate from my hands as I drew on my power. With a snap of my fingers, the swarm erupted into flames, each wasp incinerated in an instant.

Ash drifted down like dirty snow, blanketing the log and the forest floor in a gray haze. Skyler's wide eyes lifted to mine, her mouth slightly open in shock. She looked at me as though I were the monster she'd always feared I was.

"Why did you do that?" she whispered, her voice trembling.

I stared down at her, utterly confused. "I saved you," I replied, my tone flat, almost defensive.

Her expression twisted into something I couldn't quite decipher—horror, anger, maybe even sadness. "You didn't have to kill them," she said, her voice breaking slightly.

"They were going to attack you," I said, frowning. "You could have been stung."

"They were defending their home," she shot back, pulling herself from my arms. "You didn't have to destroy them!"

I watched as she brushed soot from her clothes, her hands shaking. Her reaction didn't make sense to me. I'd eliminated a threat. I'd protected her. Wasn't that what she wanted?

"They were just wasps," I said, my voice laced with irritation.

"They were alive," she said fiercely. "They were part of this forest, part of the balance here. You don't just destroy something because it's inconvenient."

Her words struck like a lash, sharp and unexpected. *The forest? The balance?* I stared at her, incredulous.

"They're just dumb insects," I snapped, my voice rising. "They would have stung us a thousand times over without a second thought."

Her shoulders sagged, but it wasn't the defeat I expected. No, there was something deeper—something almost pitying—in the way she looked at me.

"You really don't get it, do you?" she said quietly, shaking her head. "But then, how could you? You're just a demon."

The words hit harder than I wanted them to. My jaw tightened, heat flaring in my chest. *A demon.* Like it was a curse, a condemnation. As if she were superior to me in any way.

I crossed my arms, staring her down. "Enlighten me then," I said, my tone sharp. "What exactly makes those insects so worthy of your grief?"

She took a breath, stepping closer, her green eyes blazing. "Wasps aren't just insects," she said, her voice trembling but sure. "They're pollinators. They keep other insect populations in check—pests that would destroy crops, flowers, forests. Without them, ecosystems collapse."

"Ecosystems collapse?" I repeated, my voice dry with disbelief. "Over a few angry bugs?"

"Yes!" she said, her voice rising. "They're not just 'bugs.' They're part of something bigger. They pollinate plants that bees don't touch. They hunt

aphids and caterpillars and pests that would decimate entire gardens and forests. And they're food, too—for birds, for spiders, for animals that depend on them to survive."

I frowned, her words slowly clawing at the edges of my understanding. She wasn't just defending wasps. She was defending the intricacies of the world she lived in, a world that was foreign to me.

"They were going to attack you," I said, though my voice lacked its earlier bite.

"They were protecting their home," she countered, her tone firm. "Not because they're evil or mindless, but because that's what they do. You think everything is a threat, so you destroy it. But nature doesn't work that way. It's all connected—everything has a role to play, even if you don't understand it."

Her conviction was maddening. I stared at her, the fire in her words clashing against the cold logic I knew. "If I hadn't acted, you'd be covered in stings. You'd be in agony—or worse. And yet I'm the one in the wrong?"

"You didn't have to incinerate them," she said, her voice softening. "There are other ways. Smoke, distance, patience. You jumped straight to destruction because it was easier."

"And what, you'd have preferred to be stung?" I asked, incredulous.

Her gaze didn't waver. "I'd have preferred you let me handle it. I live here, Rayne. I know how to handle the forest. You don't."

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. She would've handled it? Was she delusional—or simply reckless? But as I looked into her eyes, I saw neither. I saw belief. Purpose. A kind of quiet determination that gnawed at my certainty.

The air between us was heavy with unspoken words, the faint scent of ash still lingering. She crouched beside the log, brushing her fingers lightly over the charred remnants of the nest.

"They were important," she murmured, more to herself than to me.

I clenched my fists, unsure if the anger roiling in my chest was meant for her, for myself, or for the world she so deeply revered. "They were insects," I muttered, but the words felt hollow, even to me.

She glanced up at me, her expression softening just slightly. "Maybe they were just insects to you. But here, they mattered. Here, everything matters—even the smallest, dumbest wasp."

Chapter 12

::Chapter Eleven::

Rayne

The incident in the forest hung between storm, dampening the rest of the day. Skyler avoided me, her presence reduced to a shadow that flitted about the cabin without so much as a glance in my direction. The massacre of the wasps had cut her deeply, more than I'd anticipated, and every moment

of her silence was another nail in the coffin of our tenuous bond.

The worst part? She was steeling herself against me, strengthening her resolve to sever the connection that kept me tethered to her world.

I sat in her cramped, rustic kitchen, its walls lined with herbs, jars, and drying flowers. It was quaint, earthy—the kind of place that suited her perfectly but made me feel entirely out of place. My power, once potent and endless in Hell, was ebbing away here. In the mortal realm, I relied on her energy to sustain me, but she wouldn't even let me near her.

She worked at the counter, grinding spices and mixing poultices for an order, her movements steady and deliberate. Her red hair caught the sunlight filtering through the window, turning it into a cascade of fire, but she was as cold as winter. No matter how many attempts I made to start a conversation, she answered in clipped, one-word responses that led nowhere.

"Busy day?" I ventured, forcing some levity into my tone.

"Yes."

I waited for more, but the silence that followed was deafening.

My chest tightened, a strange sensation I didn't particularly enjoy. The void between us was growing, and I hated it more than I cared to admit. I had been overconfident, assuming I could charm her with ease, but every move I made seemed to push her further away.

I needed her to like me before she could love me. But she wasn't giving me the chance.

She belonged here, in this world of leaves and soil and bird song. The forest embraced her in a way I never could. It was her domain, her sanctuary, and I was an intruder—a disruption to the delicate balance she cherished so much.

In town, it had been different. Crowds, noise, the chaos of humanity—it wasn't her element. There, she had needed me. I'd been her shield, her saviour. But here, she was utterly at home, and I was the one stumbling to find my footing.

I drummed my fingers on the wooden table, trying to suppress the gnawing frustration inside me. This wasn't going according to plan. She was supposed to see me as an ally, someone she could lean on. Instead, I'd become a nuisance—a reminder of everything unnatural and unwelcome in her world.

My eyes trailed to her hands, deft and sure as they worked the mortar and pestle. She didn't look at me, didn't acknowledge my presence. It was infuriating and... unsettling. For the first time in a long while, I found myself at a loss.

How was I supposed to fix this?

Skyler's mistrust of demons, her wariness forming a wall I couldn't seem to breach. But then, like divine intervention—if demons believed in such nonsense—a lifeline was thrown my way.

Grandma waddled into the room, her arms laden with a tray of tinctures and pouches. "We've had an emergency order from Marge," she announced, unceremoniously dropping the tray onto the table. "I need you to take these to her."

Skyler's eyes widened, realisation flickering across her face. She needed a driver.

A slow smile crept across my lips as I reached for the car keys of the death wagon. "I can drive, Skyler," I said smoothly, picking up the tray with practiced ease that made Grandma beam.

"Thank you, Rayne, such a nice young man," Grandma said warmly, her tone dripping with approval.

Skyler said nothing, her expression guarded as she finished corking a potion. Her green eyes darted to me, suspicion flickering in their depths. Good. Let her be wary. Let her think she was in control.

She followed me out to the car, her steps reluctant and measured, the death trap of a vehicle waiting for us like an ill-tempered steed.

I made a grand gesture, pulling the passenger door open with an exaggerated bow. "After you, my lady," I said, my voice dripping with sarcasm.

Skyler rolled her eyes but climbed into the car. I closed the door gently behind her, ensuring she was safely inside before leaning casually against the car.

Sliding my phone from my pocket, I quickly composed a message to Illya, my ever-reliable herald.

Send a Brainsplitter to this location.

I hit send and tucked the phone away, allowing myself a brief moment of satisfaction. A Brainsplitter was a minor demon, a creature of chaos that thrived on fear and confusion. Just the right amount of danger to remind Skyler why she needed me, without pushing her over the edge.

I circled the car and climbed into the driver's seat. The engine sputtered like an elderly goat before reluctantly roaring to life. Skyler clutched the pouch of herbs tightly in her lap, her eyes fixed on the road ahead, tension radiating from her.

Perfect.

The drive was a quiet one, the world outside stark in its isolation. No cars passed us, no signs of life beyond the endless stretch of road cutting through

the dense wilderness. The silence was oppressive, almost eerie—a perfect setting for the chaos I was about to unleash.

Skyler stared straight ahead, her fingers clutching the herb-filled tray as though it might anchor her. I chose not to force conversation, letting her stew in her thoughts while mine churned with precise calculations. Every step of my plan had to be flawless.

When we reached the town, I pulled into an empty parking spot and killed the engine. The car let out a sputtering groan, a sound that might have been amusing under different circumstances.

I stepped out quickly, circling the vehicle to open Skyler's door with a practiced flourish. The tray balanced easily in my hands as I handed it over, expecting at least a flicker of gratitude for my efforts. Instead, I was met with a cool, detached "Thank you."

She took the tray without a word, her guarded expression like a fortress I couldn't breach. "Stay here," she said simply, not bothering to meet my eyes before she turned and walked toward Marge's shop.

I leaned back against the car, watching her retreating figure. She disappeared inside without a backward glance.

The distance between us gnawed at me, her aloofness like a blade drawn across my pride. Fine, I thought. Let her think I was some idle chauffeur. Let her pretend she didn't need me.

Sliding my hand into my pocket, I pulled out my phone. My thumb hovered over the screen as I dialed the number I knew would answer.

"Brainsplitter," I said smoothly when the line connected. The demon's guttural grunt echoed back at me. "She's coming your way. I want you to scare her, but—and I cannot stress this enough—you are not to lay a single finger on her. Do you understand?"

Another grunt. That better have been agreement.

"I'll join you in due course to make the rescue. But, Brainsplitter," I added, my voice dropping into a deadly calm, "if I find so much as a scratch on her, you'll learn firsthand what it feels like to beg for the sweet release of Hell. Do you understand?"

The line went dead, Brainsplitter's crude manners doing nothing to temper my irritation. But the plan was set.

Now, all I had to do was wait. The trap was baited, and soon enough, I would swoop in to save her. Again. She'd have no choice but to see me as her protector.

And, perhaps, she'd begin to see me as more.

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Chapter 13

::Chapter Twelve::

Skyler

Marge's small store was tucked away in a quiet side alley, a hidden corner of the town where the air smelled faintly of dried herbs and candle wax. It was a strange little place, cluttered and mysterious, its shelves lined with jars of powders, bundles of dried plants, and crystals of every imaginable colour.

Marge mostly dealt with online orders, but occasionally, local witches—hedge witches like us—would stop by for supplies or drop off the odd poultice order.

I pushed the door open, a small bell announcing my arrival, and stepped inside. The warmth of the store wrapped around me like a blanket, a sharp contrast to the brisk air outside. Marge sat behind the counter, her wiry grey hair barely visible over the top of her book, which was tilted up to her face.

"Hello, dear," she croaked without looking up.

I dropped the tray of herbs and tinctures onto the counter. "Here's your order."

Marge lowered her book just enough for me to see the cover: **Horns of Desire** . A minotaur, shirtless and flexing, loomed large in the embrace of a swooning woman. My lips twitched in disbelief.

"Your Grandma recommended this to me," Marge said, catching my look. "Apparently, the Internet's gone crazy for minotaur smut."

Oh. Grandma.

"Right," I muttered, shifting awkwardly as Marge opened the till and handed me a wad of notes.

"Here you go, dear."

"Thanks," I said, turning toward the door, but I hesitated before leaving. Something about Marge's easy demeanor made me feel like I could ask her questions I couldn't ask Grandma—not without receiving another dose of eccentric wisdom about trolls or Mardi Gras.

I turned back to her, fidgeting with the strap of my bag. "Marge, can I ask you something?"

Marge raised an eyebrow over her book. "Go on, then."

"What do you know about demons?"

Her book lowered an inch further, and her sharp eyes fixed on me. "Demons, eh? Well, they're a tricky lot. Dangerous. Powerful. They tend to take more than they give. Why do you ask?"

"No reason," I said quickly, too quickly, but Marge didn't press.

She set the book down entirely now, her expression thoughtful. "If you're dealing with one, Skyler, you'd best be careful. Demons are all smoke and mirrors, and they're good at convincing you they're something they're not. They'll twist your feelings if it suits them."

Twist my feelings. The words rattled in my head as I left the shop, clutching the notes in my hand.

The street was eerily empty, the air unnaturally still. My boots echoed faintly against the cobblestones as I walked down the alley, lost in thought.

Then, a deep, guttural growl ripped through the silence.

I froze, the sound reverberating in my chest. Slowly, I turned.

A creature emerged from the shadows, its hunched form grotesque and glistening with what looked like weeping sores and filth. Its skin was mottled and stretched too tight over bones that jutted at odd angles. In one clawed hand, it gripped a rusted meat

cleaver, the blade crusted with something dark and unidentifiable.

"You," it snarled, its voice wet and venomous. "You have stolen our lord from us... and now, you must pay."

My breath hitched. This wasn't happening. It couldn't be real.

But the creature lumbered forward, the stench of decay rolling off it in waves. My feet felt like lead, my body frozen in place.

The demon raised its cleaver high, the jagged edge glinting in the dim light.

"Skyler!" Rayne's voice cut through the air, sharp and commanding.

In a blur of movement, he was there, yanking me back against his chest just as the cleaver came down with a resounding *clang* against the pavement where I had stood.

Rayne stepped in front of me, his body a shield. His presence was a wall of safety and fury, his every muscle coiled and ready to strike.

"How dare you touch her," he growled, his voice low and deadly, his gray eyes burning with a light I'd never seen before. "I will send you straight back to Hell."

The demon's twisted mouth stretched into a leer. It lunged, swinging its cleaver in a wide arc.

Rayne dodged, moving with impossible grace. He grabbed a metal trash can lid, using it as a makeshift shield. The cleaver met the lid with a deafening *clang*, the force reverberating down the alley.

"Stay back!" Rayne snapped over his shoulder, his voice sharp and unwavering.

The demon struck again, its blade slashing through the air. Rayne blocked the blow with a savage shove of the trash can lid, sending the demon staggering back.

But it wasn't enough. The demon recovered quickly, its cleaver glinting as it swung with renewed fury.

This time, the blade found its mark.

The sharp, wet sound of steel meeting flesh pierced the air. Rayne staggered, clutching his side as black blood blossomed across his pristine shirt.

"Rayne!" I screamed, panic clawing at my throat.

He gritted his teeth, his jaw tightening as he straightened. "I won't let him touch you," he spat, his voice rough and unwavering.

The demon came at him again, cleaver raised for another strike.

With a roar, Rayne thrust his hand forward, his fingers curling into claws. A surge of power erupted from him, bright and searing. The air crackled with energy as flames engulfed the demon, consuming it in an instant.

The creature howled in agony, its twisted form writhing as the fire devoured it. Then, with a burst of blinding white light, it vanished, leaving only the acrid scent of smoke behind.

The alley fell silent, the echoes of the fight fading into nothingness.

Rayne turned toward me, his face pale, his breaths shallow. His hand was pressed against his side, black blood seeping between his fingers. He took one unsteady step before his legs gave out beneath him, and he crumpled to the ground.

"No!" I cried, rushing to his side. I dropped to my knees, my hands flying to his wound. The black blood oozing from his side was warm and sticky, staining my fingers as I pressed against it, desperate to stop the unending flow.

Rayne's eyes fluttered open, dim but still arresting. His face was pale, his breathing shallow, and for the first time, I saw genuine vulnerability in him.

I didn't know what to do. "Are you okay? Tell me how to help!"

His voice came out low, rough, almost fragile. "Forget me... what about you? Are you hurt?"

"I'm fine!" I snapped, my voice trembling. "You're the one bleeding out!"

He gave a weak chuckle, then winced. "I'm too weak to heal." He paused, his gray eyes locking on mine. "I need energy... your energy."

I blinked, the words hanging between us, heavy and impossible. "My energy? How does that work?"

His voice softened, soothing and coaxing, though there was an undeniable weariness to it. "Put your arms around me, hold me. I can draw from your aura."

My instincts screamed to hesitate, to question, to flee. The idea of willingly giving a demon anything, especially something so intimate, made my skin prickle with unease. But the sight of him, his face pale and drawn, the labored rise and fall of his chest—it silenced the objections before they could fully form.

"Okay," I murmured, my voice trembling as I knelt beside him.

I slid my arms around his neck, the gesture tentative, my fingers brushing against the nape of his neck where his hair met his feverishly hot skin. He felt

solid, unyielding, and yet there was a fragility to him in this moment that was impossible to ignore. As my arms encircled him, his response was immediate.

His hands found their way to my back, pulling me against him with surprising strength for someone who had just been on the brink of collapse. My body pressed flush to his, the heat of his skin radiating through the thin barrier of fabric between us. He exhaled a shuddering breath, the sound low and guttural, as if it were both a release and a tether.

His hands tightened their hold on me, not forceful but firm, wrapping around me as though I were the lifeline keeping him anchored. His fingers brushed down my spine, tracing a slow, deliberate path that sent a shiver rippling through me. The touch wasn't invasive, but it was undeniably intimate.

Then it hit me—a pulse, electric and searing, shooting through my veins and humming beneath my skin. It was as though a dormant thread within me had awakened, connecting us in a way I didn't fully understand but couldn't deny. My magic flowed

into him, the bond between us thrumming to life with each beat of my heart.

Rayne let out a low groan, his head dipping to rest in the crook of my neck. His breath, hot and unsteady, ghosted over my skin in waves that sent shivers spiraling through me. "Keep still," he murmured, his voice strained but impossibly soft, the words brushing against my collarbone like a caress. "I just need... a little more."

My heart thundered against my ribs as his grip tightened, his fingers spreading wide across my back. His touch wasn't just firm—it was consuming, drawing me into his orbit like a moth to a flame. A warmth, unfamiliar and searing, radiated from where his hands held me, spreading through my chest and tangling my senses.

His strength grew, and with it, his movements became more deliberate. He shifted, pulling me closer, until I was fully seated in his lap. His arms encircled me, holding me as though I belonged there, and the thought sent an ache through my chest that I didn't understand.

His face pressed into my hair, the steady inhale and exhale of his breath tickling my temple. His hand glided down my back, the faint brush of his fingertips against my waist eliciting a tremor I couldn't suppress. My senses were on fire, my thoughts drowning beneath the sheer force of his presence.

The bond between us throbbed, alive and insistent, as if it had a heartbeat of its own. I clung to him, my hands fisting in the fabric of his shirt, my nails digging into his chest as though he were the only solid thing in a world suddenly spinning out of control.

When he finally lifted his head, his stormy gray eyes found mine. They burned with something raw, something unguarded, that made the air catch in my lungs. His strength had returned, his pallor gone, but there was no arrogance in his gaze now. Only intensity.

Our faces were so close, our breaths mingling in the charged silence. Every instinct screamed at me to pull away, to put distance between us, but I couldn't

move. His eyes dropped, lingering on my lips, and the world seemed to hold its breath.

Heat coiled in my stomach, spreading like wildfire through my veins. My pulse roared in my ears, drowning out reason and replacing it with a single thought—a single desire.

I didn't think.

I leaned in, my lips brushing over his in a fleeting, tentative kiss. The moment our mouths met, the connection between us surged, electric and unrelenting, sending a shiver down my spine.

Rayne froze, his body taut beneath me. For a heartbeat, I feared I'd made a mistake. But then his hand fisted in my hair, pulling me back to him with an urgency that stole my breath.

His mouth claimed mine, and the world seemed to shatter and rebuild all at once. The kiss was deep, consuming, and utterly inescapable, a rush of heat surging through me like wildfire. His fingers threaded into my hair, his grip both firm and reverent, pulling me closer as though I might vanish

if he let go. His other hand pressed against my back, his touch grounding me in this moment, yet every inch of me felt weightless, untethered.

It was nothing like I imagined a kiss would be—nothing like the stolen glances and shy touches I'd read about in books. It was raw, all-consuming, and overwhelming, leaving no room for thought, only feeling. His lips moved against mine with a hunger that left me breathless, a fierce rhythm that made my pulse race and my skin burn.

The warmth of his breath ghosted against my cheek, his scent—a dark blend of spice and fire—filling my senses. My hands clung to him instinctively, one curling into the fabric of his shirt, the other resting against his chest, feeling the solid strength of him beneath my trembling fingers.

My heart pounded so fiercely I thought it might burst. I had never been kissed before, never been touched like this, and it was more than I could comprehend. It wasn't soft or hesitant; it was commanding and full of contradictions—both tender and unyielding, consuming yet careful. My thoughts

were a blur, my body caught in the pull of something primal and electric that thrummed between us.

His teeth grazed my bottom lip, a deliberate, teasing pressure that sent a shiver down my spine. My stomach coiled, my senses spiraling, and I was sure I would drown in the sensation of him, the way he seemed to fill every part of me. This was new, foreign, and terrifying, and yet I didn't pull away. Couldn't. The bond between us flared brighter, a living thing binding us closer.

When he finally pulled back, I was left gasping, my chest heaving as though I'd been dragged from the depths of the ocean. His forehead rested lightly against mine, his breath mingling with my own in the narrow space between us. My skin was on fire, my thoughts a jumbled mess, and I couldn't bring myself to meet his eyes.

Rayne's hand remained in my hair, his thumb brushing against my temple in a gesture so gentle it felt at odds with the storm he had just unleashed. I could feel the weight of his gaze on me, intense and

unrelenting, as though he could see through every layer of me.

"What the hell was that?" I whispered, my voice shaking, barely audible.

I didn't know if I was asking him—or myself.

My first kiss had been nothing like I'd expected.

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Chapter 14

::Chapter Thirteen::

Rayne

The power—raw, vibrant, intoxicating—was unlike anything I had ever encountered. It coursed through me, surging in waves that made every nerve hum with energy. Her power was not the predictable, brittle magic of Hell; it was wild, untamed, alive. All

the might of Hell's flames paled in comparison to the vitality of what pulsed inside her.

Holding her close, our foreheads pressed together, I struggled to catch my breath. Her pulse hammered against mine, and I couldn't help but revel in the connection between us. The kiss had been an unexpected delight, the ultimate flourish to the intoxicating rush of her energy. My fingertips sparked with the magic I'd drawn from her, and for the first time in centuries, I felt invincible.

What I could do with this power...

As my hand brushed down her back, the realisation struck me with clarity. She was mine. Her power was mine. I could wield it, shape it, bend it to my will. The thought sent a shiver of excitement through me, a thrill I hadn't felt in eons.

"Rayne." Her voice, soft and uncertain, pulled me from my musings. She pulled back slightly, her wide, bright eyes searching mine. "Are you okay?"

I smiled, allowing my gaze to linger on her flushed cheeks, the delicate curve of her lips. How ironic it

was, that a girl who would mourn a wasp would find herself tangled up with a demon. "Resplendent," I replied, my voice low and smooth. I held her a moment longer than necessary, savoring the feel of her in my arms.

Her cheeks darkened to a rosy hue, and the sight sent a spark of heat through my blood. The urge to kiss her again gnawed at me, fierce and insistent. I wanted to pull her close, to feel her body pressed against mine, to hear her whisper my name in that breathy, uncertain way.

"Rayne," she murmured again, her voice quieter this time, doubt shadowing her eyes. "About that kiss—"

My thumb swept across her lips, still red and swollen from our earlier connection. "Don't think about it, my pet," I murmured, my voice carrying a note of command.

The last thing I needed was her overthinking this moment, especially now that I understood what she carried within her. She was too valuable to lose, too vital to my plans. Reluctantly, I let her go, my arms falling to my sides as she stepped out of my lap. The

absence of her warmth left me colder than I wanted to admit.

I stood, snapping my fingers, and the grime and blood vanished from our bodies with a shimmer of magic. The spell came effortlessly, the power she had given me still thrumming through my veins.

Skyler watched me warily, her arms wrapped around herself as though trying to hold everything together. Uncertainty flickered in her green eyes, shadowed by an unease she couldn't seem to shake. I stepped closer, my hands brushing lightly over her shoulders. Her tension radiated through the air between us, and I softened my tone, letting my words fall deliberately.

"Thank you," I said, my voice low, steady. "For saving me."

Her gaze dropped to where the demon's cleaver had torn into my side. She stared, her brow furrowing as though expecting the wound to reappear.

"I'm fine," I reassured her, offering a faint smile. "Thanks to you."

She exhaled, but the breath was uneven, her fingers twitching slightly. "Who was that demon?" she asked, her voice tight, hesitant. "And why did he attack me?"

Sliding my hand around her waist, I gently guided her out of the alley. She moved, but each step was stiff, mechanical, as if her body hadn't caught up to her racing thoughts.

"He was a lesser demon from my court," I explained evenly, careful to keep my tone calm. "Likely thought he could win favor by confronting the powerful witch who'd bound me."

Her pace faltered, her expression freezing in disbelief. "Bound you? I didn't bind you! I didn't mean to do any of this!"

"But he doesn't know that," I said smoothly, steering her toward the car. "To him, you're the formidable mortal who summoned and trapped a high demon. That's no small feat."

Her steps slowed even more, her face pale and tight with dread. "Are there more like him?"

"I'm afraid so," I replied, opening the car door for her. "Brainsplitter was just one of many. Lesser demons constantly vie for attention and status. They'll see you as an obstacle—or worse, an opportunity."

She stopped short, looking up at me with wide, fearful eyes. "Brainsplitter?"

"Yes," I said, almost lightly. "He's one of six brothers: Skullgrinder, Soulripper, Fleshrender, Bonebender, and Liverpicker."

Her lips parted in silent disbelief, her hands trembling at her sides.

"All of them are eager to curry favor with higher demons like myself," I continued, ignoring the way her breathing hitched. "But you needn't worry. As long as I'm here, none will harm you."

She stared at me, her expression unreadable, but her fear was tangible. When she finally moved, her steps were slow, her body rigid as I helped her into the car.

After settling into the driver's seat, I glanced at her. She was staring out the window, the tension in her shoulders unrelenting.

"Rayne," she asked suddenly, her voice quiet but sharp with concern. "Is my Grandma in danger?"

"Not with me around," I said, letting confidence settle into my tone as I started the car. The engine spluttered its usual protest, but I simply tapped the dash, a flicker of magic sparking from my fingers. The worn, clunky rattle smoothed into a steady, satisfying purr, and I couldn't help but smile.

"See?" I said, glancing at Skyler, whose wary eyes shifted from me to the now purring engine. "This is what I can do, provided, of course, I'm allowed to... top myself up with your magic."

Her brow furrowed, her arms crossing defensively as she sat back in her seat. She wasn't impressed—yet. But her distrust and resistance only made the challenge more intriguing.

Outside, the rain drummed softly against the roof of the car, a steady rhythm that mirrored her hesitation. I leaned back slightly in the driver's seat, letting the engine hum and the silence stretch. I could practically see the gears turning in her head,

weighing her options, her responsibilities. Good. Let her think it was her decision.

Finally, she exhaled, her voice steady but reluctant. "I guess... we'll need to discuss feeding you. I can see now that keeping you strong might be necessary, especially if Brainsplitter's brothers come looking for retribution."

Victory surged through me like wildfire, but I schooled my expression, keeping my satisfaction tucked behind a calm facade. I didn't need her catching on to how well my plan was working.

"Wise choice," I said smoothly, pulling the car back onto the road. The rain blurred the edges of the world outside, but my focus remained razor-sharp. "And you'll be pleased to know, I'm not demanding. A simple top-up once a day should suffice."

I paused, letting the thought simmer before throwing out the bait. "Although," I added, as if it were an afterthought, "it would be far more convenient if you let me sleep next to you. Proximity makes the exchange much easier."

I bit back a grin, keeping my eyes on the road. "Of course," I said, my voice mild and agreeable. Not yet, my little witch. But soon.

Rain drummed softly on the roof, filling the space between us. I thought the conversation was over, but I caught the subtle way her hands twisted in her lap. Her shoulders stiffened as though bracing herself.

"Okay," she said finally, her voice quieter now. "Once a day."

I stayed silent, waiting. Her fingers fidgeted, her gaze dropping to her lap, her cheeks flushed with color. She hesitated, then glanced out the window, her profile shadowed by uncertainty.

"But..." she started, her voice low. "Is there a reason it feels... so intense?"

The question lingered, her discomfort palpable. She wasn't just asking about the energy transfer. Her mind was circling back to the kiss. Mine hadn't left it either. The weight of her in my lap, the warmth of her magic flowing into me, the way her lips had felt

—soft, uncertain, perfect—it all came rushing back with startling clarity.

"It's the bond," I said finally, keeping my tone even. "Magic heightens everything. Makes it... stronger. It's normal."

Her fingers brushed her lips, her body tense. She turned her head further toward the window, as if she couldn't bear to look at me. "I don't like it," she muttered.

The corner of my mouth tugged upward. "You'll get used to it," I replied smoothly, my tone light, almost dismissive.

She folded her arms across her chest, her chin lifting slightly in defiance. I let the silence stretch out between us, not pushing her further. Let her wrestle with it, let her feel the pull of the bond she couldn't escape.

In time, she'd come to accept it—accept me.

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Chapter 15

::Chapter Fourteen::

Skyler

After getting home, my brain ricocheted between the kiss and Brainsplitter—and his brothers. Every time I tried to focus on one, the other would barrel into my thoughts, leaving me exhausted and frazzled. I couldn't tell if it was the weight of my worry or the

fact that a demon was siphoning off my magic like it was his personal buffet.

At dinner, I reached for the jug of water, intending to pour myself a glass, and instead poured it straight onto my plate. The sound of the spill snapped me back to reality, and I froze, mortified. My Grandma arched a single, unimpressed eyebrow, already moving to mop up the mess with her dishcloth.

"That bad, huh?" she muttered.

Across the table, Rayne watched, his eyes practically glinting with amusement. His face looked brighter, sharper, almost annoyingly radiant. It made me wonder just how much energy he'd pulled from me earlier.

"I think you need a good night's sleep," Rayne said smoothly, leaning forward. His hand was on my cheek before I could flinch away, his palm warm against my cold skin. The touch lingered for a second too long, sending an unsteady ripple through my chest.

I brushed his hand away. "I'm fine. I've just got... a lot on my mind."

Grandma shook her head, tsking under her breath. "No, no, you need something to settle your nerves. Let me get you my special tea, the one that always helps me relax."

I opened my mouth to protest, but she was already up, bustling around the kitchen. Rayne stayed seated, looking at me like he was trying to peel back my layers with his eyes. I dropped my gaze to my plate, stabbing at a piece of roasted carrot just to avoid his scrutiny.

Moments later, Grandma placed a steaming mug in front of me, the fragrant aroma of lavender and chamomile curling up to meet my senses. "Drink this, dear," she said firmly, giving me that no-nonsense look that left no room for argument.

I wrapped my hands around the mug and took a sip, savouring the soothing warmth that spread through me. "Thanks, Grandma," I murmured.

She patted my shoulder before returning to the kitchen, muttering something about starting tomorrow's bread.

Grateful for the reprieve, I carried the mug into the sitting room, dropping onto the couch with a heavy sigh. The fire crackled in the hearth, and I watched the flames devour a log, the wood hissing and popping as it turned to ash.

The flickering light danced across the room, but my gaze stayed fixed on the fire. The weight of the day pressed down on me like a heavy blanket. I cradled the mug in my hands, staring into the flames, trying to sort through the mess in my head.

The kiss. Brainsplitter. His brothers. Rayne.

No matter how hard I tried to organise my thoughts, they spiralled into each other, tangling into a knot I couldn't undo. I let out a shaky breath, closing my eyes. If this was my life now, I wasn't sure how much longer I could keep up.

Rayne dropped down beside me, his movements smooth, deliberate. His gaze settled on the fire, its golden light flickering across his sharp features.

"What's Hell like?" I asked sleepily, my head sinking deeper into the cushion. The warmth from the tea and the fire made my limbs heavy, but curiosity kept me from dozing off.

He glanced at me, his expression guarded. For a moment, I thought he wouldn't answer. Then, with a faint sigh, he spoke.

"It's what you'd think," he began, his voice low and smooth. "But also not what you'd think. Yes, there's fire, brimstone, tortured souls—your classic imagery. But there's also..." He hesitated, his lips curving slightly. "Paperwork. Bureaucracy. Constantly managing unhappy demons."

"Paperwork?" I echoed, a small laugh escaping me.

Rayne's lips twitched. "You'd be surprised how much record-keeping goes into damning souls."

"And managing demons?" I pressed, my amusement clear.

He nodded, a flicker of something sharp in his expression. "They complain. They argue, connive, backstab. They're always trying to claw their way up the hierarchy. It's..." He paused, exhaling through his nose. "Exhausting."

I studied his profile, the way his jaw tensed just slightly, his focus never leaving the flames. "Do you like your job?" I asked.

His gaze didn't falter, but something shifted in his tone. "I don't dislike it," he said slowly. "It's... necessary."

I straightened a little, my tiredness ebbing away. "That's not the same as liking it."

His grey eyes flicked to mine, piercing but unreadable. "Not everything in existence is about enjoyment, Skyler. Some things simply... are."

His words prickled at something inside me. I tilted my head, searching his face. "Do you ever get tired of it?" I asked, my voice soft.

There was a flicker in his expression, a crack in the wall he seemed to carry effortlessly. "Perhaps," he

murmured, quieter now. "But that's the nature of eternity."

"Could you quit, if you didn't like it?" I asked, my voice soft, the question tumbling out before I could stop myself.

Rayne's gaze lingered on the fire, the flames casting flickering shadows that softened the sharp edges of his face. "My brother, Alyd, did," he began, his voice quiet but firm. "He fell in love."

My eyes widened. "With who?"

He exhaled sharply, as if he hadn't intended to go this far. "It doesn't matter. What matters is that love made him weak. He defied Hell for her, gave up everything. And in the end..." He hesitated, his jaw tightening. "He died. She died. Their love obliterated."

The words were stark, but there was something beneath them—cynicism, maybe even bitterness—that made me lean in slightly, my fingers curling tighter around the edge of the cushion. "So, you think love is a bad thing?"

Rayne shifted, his body going unnaturally still for a moment, his carefully constructed facade slipping just enough for me to catch the flicker of unease in his eyes. Then, just as quickly, his mask slid back into place. He straightened, his posture exuding confidence, though I could sense the subtle tension in his frame.

"It's not a bad thing, per se," he said smoothly, his tone deliberately casual. "It's just... complicated."

I narrowed my eyes, refusing to let him sidestep the question. "A weakness, right?"

The faintest flicker of irritation crossed his face, but instead of snapping back, his response came unexpectedly. He leaned forward, his hands reaching for my foot. Before I could react, his long fingers encircled it, his touch surprisingly warm and gentle as he began to knead the tension away.

"We're different, Skyler," he said softly, his voice dipping into something almost intimate, coaxing me into understanding. His fingers moved over the arch of my foot, deliberate and steady, easing away a stiffness I hadn't even realised was there. The

warmth of his touch seeped through me, both soothing and unnervingly distracting. "I won't screw up like Alyd. I'll keep us safe."

My gaze flicked to his face, searching for something—assurance, honesty, anything to anchor the emotions swirling inside me. His features were calm, almost serene, but I caught the faintest flicker in his eyes, something buried too deep to name.

Was he trying to make me feel better, or was there an edge of fatalism in his tone? Did he believe this—whatever this was between us—was destined to end badly? My thoughts snagged on the words he'd said earlier: *I stayed because the bond suited me.*

And when it no longer suited him? What then? Would he leave? Disappear like smoke, taking this strange, disarming connection with him? The thought left a hollow ache in my chest, one I didn't want to acknowledge.

My mind drifted to the kiss, unbidden. The memory of his lips on mine sent a shiver down my spine, followed by the way his hands moved now, steady and deliberate, like he had all the time in the world.

Then it was just *him,* his presence consuming the edges of my thoughts, living in my head rent-free. What did any of this mean to him? Was it just part of his plan? Or was it something more?

A yawn pulled me back to the present, the heat of the flames and the rhythmic motion of his hands weaving a cocoon of drowsiness around me. My lids grew heavy, and I sank deeper into the couch. Even as my body begged for rest, my mind stayed tangled in the questions he left unanswered.

What was I to him? And why, despite everything, did I care so much?

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Chapter 16

::Chapter Fifteen::

Rayne

I stayed until she drifted into sleep. Her breathing softened, the tension in her body melting away. My hand remained on her foot, a tether of contact between us. The warmth of her skin beneath my palm felt oddly grounding, an unfamiliar sensation that I couldn't quite place.

There was something almost peaceful about watching her sleep, her face serene, her vulnerability on full display. She was so much safer under my eyes, under my protection. My protection... the thought settled uneasily. That wasn't what this bond was supposed to mean—not to me.

I wondered if this was how it had started for Alyd. That foolish idiot. He'd been sent to Earth for a mission, nothing more. The orders had been simple: conceive a child capable of killing a demon, fulfill his duty, and return. And he had obeyed, at first. One child became many. But when the time came to leave, he couldn't.

He stayed for her—for his wife.

For centuries, they ruled together, blissfully happy, until one of their spawn—a volatile blend of vampire and demon—reduced their entire kingdom to ash in a single tantrum. Alyd, his wife, their children, all of it obliterated.

I let my thumb brush absently over Skyler's foot, my mind tugging between memories of Alyd's failure and the girl in front of me. If I'd answered her

honestly earlier, I would have said that love was stupid. Dangerous. But I hadn't.

No, I'd dangled hope before her like a carrot on a stick. Because I needed her to believe this bond was real. I needed her to trust me, to lean on me. And she was starting to. The connection was growing, thread by thread, and soon it would bind her to me completely. That was the plan.

But the plan was beginning to feel... insufficient. The more I thought of letting her go after this mission, the more it felt like squandering a treasure.

She was too powerful. Too *rare.* Her magic outshone even the flames of Hell. She didn't just wield magic—she was magic. And I couldn't help but wonder how much stronger I could become with her by my side.

I bit back a groan, a different image unfurling in my mind. Skyler, in the center of my bed, her red hair fanned out over black satin sheets. The soft candlelight flickering across her skin, her cheeks flushed from—

I shoved the thought aside, dragging my hand from her foot as if it burned me.

No. She was a tool. A means to an end. This bond wasn't for her; it was for me. It had to stay that way.

Still, as I stood and moved away from her sleeping form, I couldn't quite ignore the way my chest tightened. She was far too dangerous to leave to her own devices, but the danger wasn't just her power.

It was her.

And for the first time in centuries, I didn't have a clear plan for what to do next.

That thought lingered uncomfortably until hushed whispers drifted from upstairs, breaking the silence. My ears caught the faint sound of Skyler's grandmother's voice, low and uncertain.

"I've not told Skyler yet," she whispered. There was a pause, heavy and pregnant with the weight of whatever was unsaid. "I've not had the heart."

Curiosity sparked, and I shimmered into the shadows, materializing unnoticed in the corner of

her bedroom. Grandma stood by the dresser, her phone pressed to her ear. I caught the soft tremble in her voice.

"I'm all she's got."

I tilted my head, my attention snagged by the flash of glossy paper on the dresser. Plane tickets. A single-way ticket, destination printed in bold letters: **Cardiff, Wales.**

She was leaving.

"She has a young man," Grandma continued, her tone tinged with a flicker of hope. "He seems nice. He'll hopefully take care of her—but I don't want to spend my last years living here. I want to go home."

I let the words settle as I remained in the shadows, my fingers tapping against my chin thoughtfully. Skyler didn't know. Her world, already fragile, was about to shatter.

Interesting.

A plan began to take shape in my mind. If Grandma left—and it seemed inevitable—Skyler would lose the

last anchor tethering her to this little cabin, to this tiny life. She would be uprooted, adrift. Vulnerable. And in her vulnerability, she would turn to me. She would have no choice.

I could be her constant. Her protector. Her everything.

Of course, I didn't care about her feelings or her quaint notions of family and home. What mattered was that this shift would push her closer to me, binding her more tightly to the bond we shared. With Grandma gone, Skyler would be mine to shape, to mold, to use.

I watched Grandma fiddle with the tickets, her hand brushing them as if the mere thought of leaving weighed heavily on her. She sighed deeply, a sound of resignation, then hung up the phone.

I lingered a moment longer before slipping back into the shadows and returning downstairs.

As I materialized in the quiet kitchen, a slow smile spread across my face. Grandma's plan was a gift, one I hadn't expected, but it would serve me

perfectly. Skyler wouldn't have a choice but to rely on me completely. She might not realize it yet, but I would be the constant in her life when everything else shifted.

Satisfied, I left the kitchen and wandered toward the sitting room, my gaze falling on Skyler. She was curled up on the couch, her breathing soft and even, her hair spilling like fire across the worn cushion.

My footsteps faltered. For a moment, the weight of my own thoughts—calculations and schemes—seemed jarringly at odds with the peaceful image before me. I could almost forget my purpose when she looked like this, so still, so vulnerable.

Sighing, I approached the couch. Gently, I slipped my arm beneath her, lifting her into my arms. She stirred, her brow furrowing, a soft, half-conscious sound of protest escaping her lips.

"Hush," I murmured, my voice barely above a whisper. "It's just me."

Her head nestled against my shoulder, her warmth bleeding through the fabric of my shirt. For a fleeting

moment, the feel of her against me sent an unfamiliar pang through my chest, a sensation I didn't care to name.

I shimmered us upstairs, the transition seamless and silent, and stepped into her attic bedroom. The space was small and quaint, filled with the scent of herbs and dried flowers. It was hers. Entirely hers.

Carefully, I laid her down on the bed, tucking the blankets around her like she was made of glass. She shifted slightly, her lips parting as she exhaled a contented sigh, and something in me softened despite myself.

Safe. She was safe.

I lingered for a moment, watching her sleep. The urge to brush a strand of hair from her cheek tugged at me, but I resisted. It wasn't out of affection, I told myself. It was practical. Necessary. She needed her rest to keep her magic strong—for my benefit.

Satisfied, I turned and left the room, closing the door quietly behind me.

Back in the sitting room, I stretched out on the couch, staring at the ceiling as the rain continued its steady rhythm against the roof.

So, Grandma wanted to leave.

Good.

Because when she did, Skyler would have no one else. No one but me.

Chapter 17

::Chapter Sixteen::

Skyler

The woods enveloped me in their familiar embrace. Sunlight streamed through the rustling autumn leaves, painting the forest floor with dancing, golden patterns. I trudged through the underbrush, basket in arm growing heavier with elderberries, wild apples, and a few early persimmons. Yet, despite the

peaceful setting, my thoughts were anything but serene.

Rayne hadn't been in the cottage when I woke up. Instead, I found a note left on the kitchen table, his handwriting sharp and elegant:

I have a few matters to attend to. Will be back this afternoon.
R.

The knot in my stomach tightened. I couldn't lie to myself anymore—Rayne consumed my thoughts. Every time I tried to focus on something else, my mind circled back to him. His touch, his words, his damn smirk. And then there was the kiss—the first kiss of my life—shared with a demon who radiated danger and intrigue.

I reached for a cluster of elderberries, the dark, glossy fruit hanging temptingly overhead. Stretching up on my toes, I managed to pluck the berries, their juice staining my fingers a deep purple. I wiped my hands on my skirt, the stain a small but satisfying reminder of work well done. Yet, even in this

moment of mundane accomplishment, Rayne's voice echoed in my mind.

Last night, he'd mentioned his brother Alyd. A demon who had left hell, abandoned his infernal duties, for love. The thought sent a shiver through me—not of fear, but something more complicated. If Alyd could leave hell for his wife, could Rayne do the same? Could he stay here, with me, and become something else?

I shook my head, the thought too dangerous to entertain. Rayne didn't seem pleased with Alyd's choice. There was a sharpness to his tone, a disapproval that hinted at something deeper. Maybe it was jealousy. Maybe it was resentment. Or maybe it was just Rayne being Rayne, dismissive of anything he deemed weak.

I crouched by a patch of moss, gathering a few late-season mushrooms and tucking them carefully into the basket. My mind whirled with his contradictions. He was tender one moment—his hand brushing against mine, his voice dropping into something almost intimate—and then distant the next, like last

night when he brushed aside my questions with practiced ease.

What was I to him? A tool? A tether to keep him in this world? Or was there something more?

I stood and stretched, looking out over the trees. The forest had always been my haven, a place where my thoughts could roam free without judgment. But today, the peace felt fleeting, fractured by the weight of my doubts. I imagined Rayne standing here beside me, his sharp gray eyes scanning the horizon, his presence both infuriating and comforting.

Would he use me and discard me when all this was over? Or was it possible—just possible—that I could be something more to him? Could he feel something real? Could we defy the odds, like Alyd and his wife?

I bit my lip, trying to push the thought away, but it refused to leave. The image of Rayne lingered in my mind—his face, his touch, the way he seemed to shift between predator and protector with dizzying ease.

I let out a shaky breath, gathering my basket and heading back toward the cottage.

As I approached the cottage, the sight of an unfamiliar car parked outside piqued my curiosity. Visitors were rare, and while Grandma was sociable enough for the both of us, it wasn't often we had guests.

Stepping inside, I heard Grandma's cheerful voice mingling with a warm, masculine tone I didn't recognize. I hung my cape by the door and set the basket down, following the sound toward the kitchen.

At the doorway, I paused. A young man stood next to Grandma, his light sandy hair catching the soft morning light. He was casually dressed in jeans and a light gray knit sweater that somehow made him look effortlessly polished. His broad smile and relaxed posture gave off an inviting energy. Grandma, as always, was utterly delighted.

"Ah, Skyler!" she called, spotting me hovering. "Come and meet Greg."

I stepped forward, my curiosity piqued. Greg. The landlord's son. I'd heard of him—a half troll, half siren hybrid, though looking at him, it was hard to

imagine anything troll-like about him. He had the classic charm of a siren, his warm brown eyes almost twinkling as he waved.

"I was in the neighbourhood and thought I'd drop in on my favourite supplier," Greg said, his tone easy and pleasant.

Grandma, still gripping his arm like he might float away, beamed. "Greg's taken over *The Cavern*, the potion shop in Pine Point. He's the new manager."

Greg's smile widened. "I was hoping to persuade your Grandma to come work for me," he said, turning his attention to me. "I could really use a resident witch in the shop."

I opened my mouth to respond, but Grandma jumped in first, practically glowing with pride. "Skyler would be perfect for that role. She's been making all our protection charms—you know the ones that keep flying off the shelves? That's her."

Greg's eyebrows lifted in surprise. "Really? Those charms are incredible. They're our absolute

bestsellers! Ever since we started promoting online, they've been in constant demand."

I couldn't help but feel a flicker of pride at the compliment, though I tried to keep my face neutral.

Greg's voice stayed warm and inviting as he pressed on, clearly not put off by my hesitation. "I'd love to have you come in a couple of days a week. I can pay you well for your time."

"I can't drive," I said, my tone cautious. I wasn't lying—it wasn't just the lack of a license. The thought of leaving the safety of my forested haven made my stomach twist.

Greg smiled, a genuine, easy grin. "That's not a problem. I can pick you up and drop you off."

Grandma nudged me with her elbow, her voice brimming with encouragement. "Of course she can! It's about time you got a job. It'd be good for you to get out and meet new people."

My thoughts immediately flicked back to the town—the stares, the whispers, the oppressive weight of judgment that seemed to cling to me like a shadow.

People. I hated people. I hated the way they made me feel, like I was always one wrong move away from becoming the punchline of some cosmic joke.

Greg, seemingly oblivious to my inner turmoil, added gently, "You don't have to give me an answer right now. But I really hope you'll consider it."

"I will," I replied, though the smile I offered felt more forced than genuine.

He reached out, his hand brushing my arm lightly. The touch was warm, grounding, yet there was something unusual about it. It wasn't like Rayne's touch, possessive and charged. Greg's touch was earnest, like he was trying to steady me, not claim me.

"I look forward to hearing from you," he said, his dark brown eyes locking onto mine. "In fact, you should stop by the store sometime and meet my team. You'd love them."

His gaze lingered for just a moment too long, the hypnotic pull of his siren blood tugging at the edges

of my thoughts. I managed a small nod, breaking the connection by glancing toward the open door.

We walked outside together, and I offered a polite wave as Greg drove away. I turned to Grandma, still trying to process everything.

"What on earth was that?" I asked, my voice more pointed than I'd intended.

Grandma grinned slyly, her eyes twinkling with mischief. "Healthy competition for Rayne, dear."

"Competition? For what?" I asked puzzled.

Grandma didn't answer directly. Instead, she patted my arm with a knowing air and walked back into the house.

A job?

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Chapter 18

::Chapter Seventeen::

Rayne

I pressed a finger to my forehead, trying to ward off the thrum of an impending migraine. The morning had started with Illya's call, his voice urgent, insisting I return to my court. An imp had supposedly spotted the pregnant half-demon sheltering in a cave near the fields of shadow blight in the fifth circle of hell.

It was the kind of lead that could not be ignored.

Of course, the outcome had been predictable chaos. I'd called upon five legions to scour the rotting fields, tearing through every cave, hovel, and shadow-infested corner we could find. The imps who worked the fields, punishing the condemned souls by forcing them to tend eternally to the withered, blackened crops, had been less than pleased with my intrusion.

"Do you have any idea what you've done?" a particularly bold white imp screeched, its glowing red eyes narrowed in fury. It waved its clawed hands at me, its voice grating like nails on a chalkboard. "The punishment schedule is in complete disarray! I'll be speaking with Prince Loki about this—you can't just come in here, tearing up our fields, disrupting the punishment of the wicked!"

I half-listened, the words fading into a dull hum as my thoughts strayed. The fifth circle was a bleak and fetid place, stinking of rot and despair. It should have been impossible to think of anything pleasant here, but my mind betrayed me. I imagined Skyler walking through the forest, her hair a cascade of fire against

the green, her hands brushing the bark of trees as she gathered berries or mushrooms. The thought was jarringly out of place, yet it refused to leave me.

Flexing my hand, I watched as faint sparks of energy crackled between my fingers. This was taking too long. I wanted this over. I wanted to go back to her.

"His Vilness has full permission from Prince Loki to search these fields," Illya interjected sharply, stepping forward to shield me from the imp's wrath. His tone carried the weight of authority, and for a moment, the imp faltered.

"But—" the imp began, only to be cut off by Illya's glare.

"Enough," Illya snapped, his patience clearly wearing thin. "Would you like me to summon Prince Loki himself? I'm sure he'll be thrilled to hear you question his orders."

The imp's defiance crumbled, and it retreated with a muttered curse, its grumbling fading into the distance.

"Are we done here?" I asked, my voice low and bored.

Illya turned to me, his lips pressing into a tight line. "The lead was a dead end, Your Vilness. The half-demon isn't here."

I let out a slow breath, standing and brushing imaginary dust from my sleeves. "Then we leave. I won't waste another moment in this pit."

llya hesitated, his gaze lingering on me, searching. "You seem... distracted."

I arched an imperious brow, barely masking my irritation. "Of course, I'm distracted. I've been tasked with stopping the end of the known world. Wouldn't you be, if you were in my shoes?"

His lips pressed into a thin line, as though weighing his next words. Then, almost too quietly, he muttered, "You're starting to remind me of Alyd, just before—"

A ball of white-hot plasma crackled to life in my palm. Illya's eyes snapped to it, and wisely, he shut his mouth.

"I am not like my brother," I said coldly. "And if we're done here, I have more important matters to attend to."

Illya inclined his head in a respectful bow, though his silence carried an unspoken challenge. I ignored it. Without another word, I shimmered out of hell and back into the mortal realm.

When I reappeared outside the cottage, the sight of an unfamiliar car's tail lights vanishing up the driveway barely registered. Visitors were rare here, but I didn't linger on it. My thoughts were elsewhere—on her.

I shimmered into the house, appearing silently behind Skyler at the kitchen sink. She was humming softly, rinsing the fruits she'd foraged earlier. The sound, the sight of her so at ease in her own world, stirred something unfamiliar within me. Peace. Contentment. For a fleeting moment, it was enough to silence the restless hum that had followed me from Hell.

"Busy morning?" I purred into her ear, letting my voice brush against her like silk.

She startled slightly, her shoulders giving the barest twitch before she spun to face me. A delicate blush spread across her cheeks, her hands still dripping from the water.

"Rayne... I... I didn't hear you come in," she stammered, wiping her wet hands on her apron. Her voice was soft, her tone laced with surprise, and those vivid green eyes flicked up to meet mine for just a moment before skittering away.

I smiled, savouring the way her cheeks turned that familiar, captivating shade of pink. There was something about her shyness, her inability to hold my gaze for long, that fascinated me endlessly. She was so strong in some ways, yet in moments like this, so vulnerable. And the way she smelled—forest air, wildflowers, sunshine—it wrapped around me, settling the constant restlessness that seemed to churn beneath my skin.

"I concluded my business early and rushed back here, to be with you," I said smoothly, the words slipping from my mouth without much thought. My focus was solely on her, the delicate way she moved,

the light in her eyes when she spoke. "How has your morning been?"

She fidgeted slightly, her hands twisting the edge of her apron, and my chest tightened. Her nervousness around me was like a balm and a challenge all at once.

"Nothing much," she murmured, her voice so soft it felt like it was meant for only me. She glanced back down at the sink, her fingers brushing over the foraged fruit she'd collected. "I just went foraging near the creek. There are a lot of persimmons out this year and—"

Her voice hitched, and my hand moved before I even thought about it, catching a stray lock of her hair and tucking it gently behind her ear. My fingers brushed against her skin, soft and warm, and she froze. Her breath hitched audibly, and I was lost in the way her lips parted slightly, the way her pulse quickened against the curve of her neck.

I should have stopped. I should have pulled back. But instead, I lingered, my fingers ghosting over her temple for a moment longer than necessary. The

quiet hum of her magic thrummed faintly between us, and I couldn't help but marvel at it, how it felt like a thread binding her to me.

Then her words hit me.

"—Grandma's supplier's son paid us a visit. He was really nice, and he wanted me to visit him."

The world seemed to tilt, her voice dragging me out of whatever spell her presence had cast. My hands moved on their own accord, both palms bracing against the kitchen counter, caging her in. The motion was sudden, sharp, and left her wide-eyed and frozen.

"Who is this?" I asked, my voice calm, even pleasant, though my veins burned with white-hot jealousy.

She blinked up at me, startled. "Um... Greg," she said hesitantly. "He's a new manager at one of the stores we supply to."

Greg. I repeated the name in my head, my fingernails biting into the counter's edge. Who the fuck was Greg?

"And why does Greg want you to visit him?" I pressed, keeping my expression relaxed despite the sharpness in my voice.

Skyler shifted uncomfortably, her brows furrowing. "He just mentioned he's looking for someone to work part-time at the shop. He thought I'd be a good fit."

I forced a smile, though the effort made my jaw ache. "How thoughtful of him," I drawled, the words tasting like ash on my tongue. "But surely you're too busy here to entertain such an offer."

Her gaze flicked to the sink, her eyes avoiding mine, and the tension in the air thickened. "It's just a few days a week," she murmured, almost like she was convincing herself. "And Grandma seemed to think it was a good idea."

"Did she now?" I kept my tone light, but inside, every muscle in my body coiled tighter, a predator waiting to pounce. "So, are you planning on visiting him?"

Her hands fidgeted with the hem of her apron, a nervous habit I couldn't help but notice. "I was—I

mean, he's one of our key suppliers. It would be rude not to."

Her hands fidgeted with the hem of her apron, a nervous habit I couldn't help but notice. "I was—I mean, he's one of our key suppliers. It would be rude not to."

Before I could respond, my phone buzzed. I slid it from my coat pocket and glanced down.

Loki: *Heard you fled the fifth circle in quite the hurry. Tell me, brother—are you growing fond of the witch?*

The words sank in like a blade, cruel and precise.

I looked up at Skyler—flushed cheeks, downcast lashes, hands stained from fruit picking. Soft. Mortal. A tool, not a temptation. I exhaled slowly, forcing the fire in my chest to cool. I wasn't jealous. That would be... ridiculous.

I smoothed my shirt, stepping back from her. "We should pay..." I paused, letting the name slide from my tongue like poison, "Greg a visit. He sounds... charming."

Skyler raised an eyebrow, suspicious. "We can go tomorrow. Pine Point isn't far. Afterwards, we can swing by town—there are some books I ordered."

I managed a smile. "Wonderful."

And it was. Because tomorrow, I'd meet the man who thought he could win her. And then I'd remind him—and myself—exactly who she belonged to.

Follow me on...
angeltwists
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Chapter 19

::Chapter Eighteen::

Skyler

Greg's store was tucked away down a narrow, twisting back alley, the sort of place you'd only find if you already knew it was there. A faded purple sign swung gently above the door, painted with whimsical silver lettering that read **THE CAVERN** . Outside, carved pumpkins grinned up from worn wooden crates, surrounded by tiny resin witches, black cats

with curled tails, and bundles of cinnamon sticks tied with twine. It was the kind of shop that balanced perfectly between charming tourist trap and serious witch's trove.

Rayne stood beside me on the uneven cobblestone, staring at a resin figurine of a cackling witch stirring a cauldron. He nudged it with his shoe, expression disdainful. "How twee."

I shot him a dark look. "If you're going to be a snob about it, you can stay in the car."

His gaze snapped to me, his sunglasses lowering just enough for our eyes to meet. "Stay in the car while you go visit Greg?" His voice was smooth, but there was a bite underneath.

Whenever I mentioned Greg, Rayne's entire face would stiffen. His polite smile would freeze at the edges, and he'd blink just a little too deliberately, like he had to remind himself how. It was unnerving—and oddly telling. Still, I ignored it.

"Greg's family have been loyal customers of ours for years. They help pay our bills," I said pointedly. "So

maybe try not to alienate the people who keep us stocked with flour and electricity."

Rayne's arm tightened around mine, his thumb brushing over my pulse like he was testing how quickly he could make it race. "Oh, I'll be charming as a devil," he purred.

I groaned inwardly, already picturing the smug, territorial glint he'd no doubt flash at Greg.

Truthfully, there were two reasons I needed to come here. One was entirely professional: Greg was one of our best customers, and I couldn't afford to let my awkwardness around people—or Rayne's peculiar brand of demon possessiveness—ruin that.

The second reason was far less comfortable. The bookshop down the street had called that morning to say my special order had arrived: two hefty tomes on demons and exorcisms. Even knowing I'd bought them sat uneasily on my conscience, like a secret itching beneath my skin. Especially with Rayne right beside me, breathing down my neck—sometimes literally.

He leaned down, his lips brushing my ear as he whispered, "Shall we?"

His voice sent an involuntary shiver down my spine, though I couldn't tell if it was irritation or something far more dangerous. With a resigned breath, I squared my shoulders and stepped forward, Rayne shadowing me closely, ready to turn this quick errand into another silent, smug battle for dominance.

I pushed open the door and was immediately hit by the scent of sandalwood, dried lavender, and cinnamon. Inside, a young woman with pixie-like features leaned over a tarot spread. Greg lounged across from her, in khaki cargo pants and a fitted black t-shirt, his grin wide.

"So, what's it say about my love life?" Greg teased, leaning forward.

Beside me, I felt Rayne's muscles stiffen like coiled wire.

Across the shop, someone coughed. A stunning elf with silver hair swept into view, balancing a tray of bottles labeled **"improve your rizz potions."**

Greg's head snapped up. His face broke into a broad smile as he jumped to his feet. "Skyler! You came." His warm brown eyes sparkled, completely ignoring Rayne. "Welcome! This is Bea," he said, nodding to the pixie girl, "and that's Kai."

The elf gave me a graceful curtsey, which made me smile despite the tension.

"I'm so glad you're here," Greg said, striding over with his arms outstretched—clearly aiming for a hug.

But Rayne stepped in, blocking him like a stone wall. In his immaculate suit, he extended a hand instead, all polite menace. "Greg. A pleasure. Skyler's told me so much about your fine establishment."

Greg looked at the hand, then at me. Finally, he took it, squeezing harder than necessary. "Great to meet you... Roy, was it? Ray?"

"Rayne," he corrected, his smile tightening.

"Right. Skyler never mentioned you, Roy." Greg said flatly.

I opened my mouth to fill the awkward silence, about to say "he's a friend," but Rayne beat me to it. His arm wrapped around my waist, pulling me firmly to his side.

The entire shop seemed to freeze. Bea's eyes went comically wide, Kai nearly dropped the tray of tinctures they were carrying, and Greg's mouth actually fell open. Even I was left gaping at him.

"Well," Greg finally whistled, recovering first. "It's so nice you could tag along, *Roy* ."

"Rayne," he corrected, his polite smile stretched so tightly it looked painful.

Kai, clearly deciding to rescue me, slipped in with a gentle touch to my elbow. "It's so wonderful to finally meet the witch behind our best-selling protection charms," they said warmly. "Can I get you a tea or maybe a herbal mate?"

"A peppermint tea would be lovely, thank you," I said, grateful for any distraction.

Bea quickly swept aside her tarot cards, patting the chair in front of her with an eager grin. I sank into it, relieved—until Greg dropped into the seat beside me, leaning close, his clean warm scent overtaking my senses. Then, of course, Rayne draped himself into the chair on my other side, arm casually slung over the back of my chair, fingers brushing my shoulder as though to brand his claim.

"It's so nice to finally visit your shop," I said, forcing brightness into my voice despite feeling like a tug-of-war rope. "My grandma always spoke highly of you and your father."

Greg's eyes softened, a smile lifting the corners of his mouth as he ran a hand through his tousled brown hair. "Yeah, our families go way back. My dad always hoped you'd get involved with the business somehow. We've needed someone exactly like you—a witch with practical knowledge of charms and potions."

Kai returned with my steaming mug of peppermint tea, and offered Rayne something, which he declined

with a curt shake of his head, eyes locked on Greg the entire time.

For the next twenty minutes, I listened as Greg explained how things ran. Bea, it turned out, was a part-fairy who read fortunes and brought in foot traffic, while Kai was an elf and full-time musician who did this to pay for their studio time. Greg had taken over the shop from his father and turned it into a growing online business, selling potions, charms, and spell kits across the country.

"We really need a witch to help scale up production," Greg said, eyes shining. "Business exploded during the pandemic—people sitting at home ordering luck jars and protection sachets by the crate. I can offer you a competitive salary, overtime if you want it. Plus it might be nice for you, getting out, meeting new people."

I chewed the inside of my cheek. The idea of steady income—of helping pay bills instead of just hoping our old suppliers kept coming back—was tempting. I'd never thought much about leaving the safety of our cottage and woods, but maybe it was time. Still,

the thought of being surrounded by people all day made something inside me tighten up.

"I'll... have to think about it," I said carefully.

"Of course," Greg said, his hand brushing lightly over my arm. "No pressure. Just know we'd be lucky to have you."

I cleared my throat, desperate to cut through the thick, crackling energy. "Do you still stock that sage spray? Grandma can't burn sage anymore because of her lungs."

Greg seemed grateful for the pivot. "Of course. Follow me."

I slipped out from under Rayne's arm and walked with Greg across the shop to a small wooden stand lined with bottles. Each was neatly labeled with scrawling white ink: *Sage & Cedar* , *Lavender & Rue* , *Black Salt Protection* . I picked one up, rolling it between my fingers, trying to steady myself.

But Greg's eyes were fixed on me, sharp with curiosity. He leaned in a little, his voice dropping low.

"So... are you and *Roy* serious? Your grandma said he's only been around for, what, five minutes?"

My hand tensed around the glass bottle. I nearly dropped it. Heat flooded my cheeks as my eyes darted past Greg's shoulder. Rayne stood by the counter, his hand gripping the back of my chair so tightly his knuckles had gone bone white. His dark eyes were locked on us, unreadable—but the power simmering under his skin was impossible to miss. He could absolutely hear every word.

I swallowed. "It's... complicated," I admitted, the words thin and brittle. It was the most honest answer I could give. Rayne and I were bound together by magic, not by anything soft or tender. He played the jealous lover well enough, but only because it served his purposes. He was a demon, and I was his anchor to this world. Love wasn't part of it. Couldn't be. Even if his kisses still burned across my lips.

Greg must've seen something flicker in my expression. His features softened, the playful glint giving way to something almost tender. "Hey, look—

have the spray on the house, alright? Consider it a gift."

"No, really, I can pay—" I reached for my purse, but Greg's hand was already waving me off.

"Skyler," Greg said, warm and earnest, "take it. Just... think about the job, okay? You'd be a huge asset. And honestly... I think you'd be happy here."

I managed a small, grateful smile, clutching the bottle a little too tightly. Meanwhile, I could practically feel Rayne's stare scorching into my back—heavy, possessive, unsettling. I thanked Greg quickly and excused myself.

Outside, Rayne opened the door for me, but not without shooting Greg a withering look over his shoulder. As soon as we stepped into the cool air of the alleyway, he slid his sunglasses back onto his head, jaw tight.

"Well," he drawled, "that was fun."

"They were nice people. It was a nice store," I shot back, hugging the bottle of sage spray to my chest.

"That troll was practically dry humping you," Rayne snapped, dripping acid.

"He was being nice," I countered, glaring at him.

"By asking if we were serious?" He let out a sharp, humourless laugh. "Right. Clearly a sign of pure, selfless hospitality."

"Oh, like you don't have ulterior motives for half the nice things you do," I fired back before I could stop myself.

I felt my frustration twist into something almost guilty. Because...part of me wanted to accept the job. Part of me liked the normalcy of it—a friendly face, a steady job, a chance to build something that wasn't tangled up in hellfire and black magic.

But another part, the darker, shameful part, had thrilled at Rayne's reaction. At his jealousy. At the way his hand found my waist, possessive, reminding me who I belonged to.

Rayne's eyes darkened, his smile turning into something sharp. He stepped closer, invading my space so completely I had to tilt my chin up to meet

his gaze. "Careful, little witch. I'm the only reason you're alive and able bat your lashes at half-breeds."

Heat flared through me, equal parts thrill and irritation. "I didn't bat my lashes," I muttered.

"You might as well have." His hand brushed my waist—possessive, claiming. "Next time, keep in mind whose bond keeps you safe."

I pulled away from his grip, my pulse hammering for reasons I couldn't even untangle. "Trust me, I haven't forgotten."

Chapter 20

::WARNING::

This marks the end of the edited chapters.

The following chapters are unedited and may no longer tie in with the edited story.

You can wait for the next edited chapter or read ahead at your own risk.

Chapter 21

Dark Black Magic: how I accidentally captured a demon prince- chapter 13- the climb

Cold icy wind rushed around me as Greg pulled me through the forest. Behind me I heard giant splintering noises of wood breaking as Aidan smashed the trees snarling and snapping at our heels. Greg held on to my arm tightly, "There is a rock face coming up, Aidan won't be able to climb it." He said cheerfully yanking me out the way of a sharp missile of wood that had exploded behind us.

In the gloom I saw a large craggy rock face several hundred feet high. At the top was a grassy plateau, Greg turned to me, "If we get up there, we are out of Aidan territory and off the menu."

"I'm not very good at climbing." I whimpered.

"Do you want to become dog meat?" Greg asked.

I shook my head. Greg grabbed my waist and lifted me up on to a small boulder and said, "Climb!"

The rock was loose and crumbly under my fingertips and in the pitch black I found it difficult to find my footing. When I had traveled up about three feet I noticed Greg was already half way up. He looked down at me and yelled, "Go faster."

I rushed, pulling myself up, below me Aidan was taking giant leaps, hurling himself against the rock. I was just out of reach but occasionally my foot would slip and dangle within his grasp. My palms became clammy and I felt faint. I kept hauling myself up. Greg was stood at the top of the cliff cheering me on. I pulled myself up a little further and looked down. I was well out of Aidan's reach but I was nowhere near the top. The height made me nauseous. My legs were slowly turning into jelly. When I passed halfway I was exhausted. Below me I could hear Aidan's men hollering to each other, "She's going to fall!", "She' wobbling!". Every time my leg or hand slipped on a

rock they began to jeer. Greg peer over the top of the plateau down at me, "Skyler you're not looking so hot." He said concerned.

Dizzy, I looked back down again and felt a wave of nausea hit me. Greg scrambled over the edge, "Don't move, I'm coming to help you!" He ordered.

His voice seemed to was over my as my sense came light and fuzzy. The wolves below were shouting excitedly, "Timber!"

Greg was yelling at me to hold but disaster struck. The ledge I was holding cracked. Greg shouted, "Grab on to another ledge!"

I lifted my hand up and felt the ledge I was gripping on to fall away. I lost my balance and fell back, air came whooshing round my ears and I closed my eyes bracing myself for the impact below. Suddenly the air changed current as if I was traveling up, puzzled I opened my eyes to take a peek and I found myself in Rayne's arms. My legs and arms were numb and my vision was very fuzzy, I could just make out his face. Confused I looked up at him, "Am I in Hell?" I asked.

He looked furious, he must be angry that I managed to get myself killed. Flatly he told me, "You are not dead."

Focusing harder I saw a pair of black wings coming out of Rayne's back pounding the air. Stunned I watched mesmerized, "Rayne you have wings." I said.

"I noticed." He replied irritable.

Rayne landed on the grassy plateau and gently put me down next to an emotional Greg. Greg threw his arms out wide and came staggering towards me. Rayne crushed me to his side and said in a low tone, "No one is allowed to touch her except me."

Greg froze to the spot his arms dropping to his side and nodded. Angrily Rayne grabbed my shoulders and shook me, "What were you thinking! Being so reckless! Are you trying to get yourself killed!" He shouted.

Wincing away I shrugged, "It was an accident."

Rayne let out a cold humorless laugh, "You were accidentally climbing up the rock."

"It wasn't like that! Those wolves were chasing me. They were going to rip me and Greg to pieces, we had no option!"

Rayne's dark gazed wandered to the circling wolves below.

"Stay here." He said quietly walking to the over hang.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

Rayne did not reply.

The hairs on the back of my neck stood on end. "You're not going to kill them?" I whispered dryly.

Chapter 22

Dark Black Magic: how I accidentally captured a demon prince- chapter 14- if looks could kill

Rayne was going to kill Aidan.

"Stand away from the edge, close your eyes and cover your ears if you think it will bother you." Rayne said.

Greg who had been silently standing in the background came forward, "You can't go down there! There is one of you and twenty of them, you'll be torn apart." He shouted at Rayne who coolly shrugged. "I'm a demon."

Greg's mouth dropped open and hung for a few seconds before he stuttered, "A demon?!?" He turned

to me and asked "How did a nice human girl get involved with a demon?"

Sheepishly I replied, "I found him. He was lying in my Grandma's vegetable patch one morning."

Greg was lost for words, bewildered he shook his head and took a few steps back. Rayne in the meantime had been watching Aidan's pack and I was about to reason with him Rayne leapt into the air catching a gust of wind and glided over the tops of the trees. Greg grabbed my arm.

"Skyler, keeping company with a demon is very unwise." He warned.

I scowled at Greg and snapped, "Rayne is about to commit mass murder. My poor choice of company is the last thing on my mind."

Scrambling towards the cliff edge I lowered myself down. Greg grabbed both my wrists this time. "I can't let you do this." He said pulling me.

"Greg, I'm not about to let all those werewolves get killed because of me. I have to stop Rayne."

Greg paused and gave an inward groan, "Urgh- you're right. Stay there." He said scampering off. A few seconds later he came back with a pile of rope.

"We keep this hidden in one of the bushes nearby. It's an enchanted rope. Loop it around your waist and it will lower you safely to the ground." Greg instructed.

Carefully I looped the rope my waist and it began to steadily drop down on its own accord. Soon I was on the ground.

Aidan was back in human form.

"Why did you come back down?" He asked.

"Rayne's going to kill you." I said.

Aidan snorted disbelievingly. "Was he the big bat thing that flew off?"

"Don't piss him off." I begged.

"Do you think he would be mad if I ate you? I'm starving after that run." Aidan said.

I was now beginning to regret coming back down here to save him. Stepping back Aidan stepped forward taking off his leather jacket. Somehow he

had magically dressed himself in-between morphing from wolf to human. The other members of the pack watched intensely waiting for Aidan to strike. Aidan took another step forward and jumped into the air turning into a wolf. I watched the black blur hurtle toward me and I raised my arms protectively across my head. A loud whimper followed.

Rayne was once again in front of me but this time he was holding Aidan by the throat. Aidan had turned back into a human and was gasping and croaking for air. His legs scrapped against the floor as Rayne held him just so the tips of his toes could touch the floor. Angrily I pounded against Rayne's chest.

"You're killing him!" I screamed.

Rayne lifted an eye brow, "That's the idea."

"Rayne let him go!"

"I don't feel like it."

"Rayne I order you to drop him."

A muscle in Rayne's face twitched as he let go of Aidan. Rubbing his neck, Aidan stared up in

bewilderment. Rayne turned on me, "He almost killed you!"

"But he didn't." I pointed out.

"Because I stopped him!"

"Exactly. No harm, no foul."

"Skyler you don't understand. They wanted to murder you. I was trying to protect you. I'm doing this for you."

"You think I want the blood of those idiots on my conscience!" I finally snapped. Rayne didn't reply. He gave me a downtrodden look and stood down. He held his hand out towards me and said, "Let's go home."

I reached out towards him and when I heard Aidan mutter in a low voice behind me. "She wouldn't have gotten herself into this mess if that demon hadn't been making out with Loki."

The fight was back on. Rayne with his supernatural hearing ability caught every syllable and launched himself at Aidan. Opening my arms out wide I threw

myself in between them, "Stop it," I said "Rayne I order you to leave Aidan's territory and never ever set foot inside here again."

Rayne's face fell. He looked very stiff and angry but simply nodded in reply. He had choice, he had to obey me. Biting his tongue he marched up to me while Aidan grinned defiantly behind me. Rayne's mouth curved into a cruel smile. "I will never set foot in your territory again and in case you set foot in mine," In one swift movement Rayne lifted me over his shoulder and swiped the air with his free hand, Aidan let out a howl of pain, "I will remember you by your scar." Rayne finished.

Flailing in Rayne's grasp I looked behind me to see Aidan cupping his face, trickles of blood escaping between his fingers. Horrified I opened my mouth to shout at Rayne, but he quickly slotted in, "Your order specifically said not to kill him."

Rayne then leapt into the air and flew up to Greg who had been watching the whole fiasco below. Looking quite white he heaved uneasily, "Sorry the sight of

blood makes me come over queasy." He explained gasping for air.

"Sorry Greg, Rayne is not usually this unfriendly." I apologized glowering at Rayne.

"It's okay. I was just thinking. Tomorrow the shop is shut. Kai and me could bring round the van and help you move."

"Thanks! We'd really appreciate it! Wouldn't we Rayne?" I said. Rayne was too busy leaning over the edge watching Aidan.

"Great." Greg beamed.

We exchanged numbers and I explained to Greg where to find our house. At he end of our conversation Greg cheerfully went to hug me but Rayne who had been preoccupied with exchanging filthy looks with Aidan below, looked directly at Greg and said, "No touching."

Greg nodded and backed away his hands raised defensively up in the air. We said goodbye and I was left alone with Rayne.

Chapter 23

Dark Black Magic: how I accidentally captured a demon prince- chapter 15- the move

Up on the grassy plateau Rayne stared at me his arms folded against his chest. This was one of the few times I had given him a direct order. Rayne wanted to kill a pack of werewolves and I had stopped him. He was my responsibility and I would have to install a bit of good old fashioned human morality. Killing was definitely no-no.

It had been a long night, and I was longing for my bed and a warm house. I could argue with Rayne in the morning. Approaching Rayne I looked up wearily and said, "Can we go home? I'm cold and tired."

Rayne heaved an irritated sigh and lifted me carefully off the ground. Closing my eyes he flew high above the tree to the wooden shack that I called home. Landing in my front garden he carefully put me down and we both trod inside. The evening had been long and eventful with vampires, demons and werewolves. Crawling into bed, Rayne laid next to me. I was so tired I didn't even bother building the make shift barrier I usually did to keep Rayne from snuggling close. Closing my eyes I drifted into a heavy sleep.

The strange girl Mia did not invade my dreams tonight. Instead I dreamt of a girl crying in dark room. All around her lay clumps of hairs that had fallen out of her scalp. Just as I reach out to touch her, Rayne gave me a sharp poke. My eyes flew open and he is leaning over me.

"I smell troll." He said.

Rubbing my eyes I looked at my watch. It was late morning and the autumn sun was beaming. Outside Greg had arrived with his friend Kai, they had brought a large black beaten up old van covered in

dents and scratches. Throwing Rayne out the room, I quickly got dressed in an old pair of dungarees and a white t-shirt that I only wore for jobs like gardening and decorating. Flying downstairs I saw Rayne standing awkwardly against the counter staring at a tall blonde guy while Greg stood in the corner smiling nervously. Catching my eye Greg beamed and came towards me arms outstretched. A loud bang echoed throughout the kitchen as Rayne slammed his fist against the wooden counter. Greg playfully smiled, "Sorry I forgot, no touching."

"Just ignore Rayne. He's in a bad mood." I said waving at Greg.

"Your home is cool, I love the décor, is that deer head real-" As Greg babbled the blonde man behind him gave a sharp cough. Greg clapped is hand to his forehead, "Sorry Kai," he said. "Skyler this is Kai."

"Hello." I smiled nervously. Socialising was a skill I had never mastered.

"Hey." Kai said bluntly.

Greg opened his mouth to talk again but Rayne said loudly, "Shall we just get on with this?"

Rayne grabbed several boxes and noisily stalked off to the van. Kai shrugged and followed Rayne picking up a few boxes and going outside. Greg watched them leave and then darted over to me wrapping his arms around me and giving me a big hug. The hug was warm and friendly and I stood there like a plank of wood unsure how to react. Gingerly I patted Greg on the shoulder. Greg quickly jumped back as Rayne and Kai silently walked back in and picked up some more boxes. When they left Greg turned to me and whispered loudly, "I hate being so uptight around people when I'm so happy to see you! How was your night? Rayne looked like his was about to have kittens when I left you."

"He hasn't really spoken to me." I replied keeping my voice low.

"He didn't look to happy a few seconds ago." Greg sighed.

"What are we talking about?" A voice whispered behind Greg and I. Turning I saw Loki leaning towards us listening in on our hushed conversation.

Greg jumped out of his skin and pushed me back behind him. Loki smiled pleasantly and picked up a cardboard box, "I thought I would help you move." He said.

"Do you know this guy?" Greg asked shakily.

"We met last night. He's Rayne boyfriend." I said flatly feeling a tad bitter.

Loki laughed, "Skyler, Skyler, Skyler, my feelings towards Rayne are affectionate but not romantic. We go a long way back and have had many enjoyable wars between our Kingdoms, my personal favourite being the Battle of Grimshank in the War of Noctune. But I shan't bore a young girl with tales of grizzly murder. Now Skyler please introduce me to this scallywag." He looked at Greg who seemed to be backing slowly away.

"This is Greg- who I also met last night."

"Greg, now let me guess a half breed troll with a pinch of siren, how charming. I am Loki a Prince of Hell but don't let that intimidate you I am a very well mannered demon." Loki said.

Greg nodded and muttered something about helping the others and scampered off. Loki watched him run off before diverting his attention back to me. "I know Christmas is a few months away but I want to give you this." He said handing me a sealed envelope addressed in silver writing, 'To Miss Skyler and servant'

"I suppose the servant means Rayne." I said.

"Indeed. It is an invitation to my little Yuletide Ball that I hold in my castle every year."

Raising an eyebrow I asked, "You celebrate Christmas?"

"Why not? Everyone does nowadays, religious and non-religious alike."

"I guess although it seems a little ironic, you being a demon and all."

"Demon is a job status. We are not the damned we are merely prison guards of the damned."

"Where is your castle?"

"It resides in Hell, but for these occasions I move it up to a little place in Bulgaria that it quite pretty, especially in the winter."

"Bulgaria is the other side of the world and I don't even have a passport or enough money for a flight."

"Nonsense, you can borrow my carriage, it's much faster then a plane."

"I don't know," I said unsure, "Ask Rayne."

"He already said yes." Loki smiled.

Something smelt fishy but I didn't want to say no to a powerful demon. Clutching the letter I forced a smile and said, "We would be delighted."

Loki beamed back clapping his hand on my shoulder, "That's my girl." He smiled.

Greg, Kai and Rayne walked back into the room. Rayne stared at me, "Who were you talking to?" he asked.

"Loki-" I turned but Loki had vanished.

Rayne eyes glazed over and he picked up another box and marched it out to the van. Greg and Kai exchanged puzzled looks and carried on.

I locked the house up and handed the keys to a smiley estate agent. Kai and Greg had drove ahead in the van with all my worldly possessions init while Rayne and I had stayed behind. We would follow in Grandma's beat up old car. Signing a few papers the estate agent left and with a heavy heart I said goodbye. Rayne waited for me sitting on the bonnet of the car.

"Goodbye house." I murmured blinking away the tears.

Chapter 24

Dark Black Magic: how I accidentally captured a demon prince- chapter 16- car problems

The car journey was uneventful. Rayne sat silently driving occasionally muttered a cuss word under his breath whenever the engine threatened to fail. I wondered how Grandma was doing in Wales. She had promised to send me a post card to my new flat. Glancing up from my seat I noticed Rayne looking at me almost scowling. His pale gray eyes were the color of dark angry storm clouds that seem to pierce straight through me. My heart began pounding and I suddenly felt the need to break the uneasy silence. Glancing at the white streak in his black hair I remarked, "Is that natural, the streak in you hair?"

"Yes." Rayne replied.

"That's very unusual-"

"If you don't like it I can change it."

"No! I didn't mean it like that."

"Then why mention it."

"I'm just being nosy. Sorry, I didn't mean to upset you." I said looking back out the window. The car fell silent but not for long. The engine gave an almighty bang and black smoke billowed from underneath the bonnet and seeped through the vents into the car. Rayne clamped his hand over my mouth, "Don't breathe." He ordered pulling the car over. As soon as we stopped I scrambled out the car on to the side of the road. The engine was hissing and spitting and I saw the flicker of a flame. My initial thought hadn't been flames+gas = explosion; my initial thought was to say something dumb like, "Look Rayne, the car is on fire.", and I would have said just that if I hadn't been thrown to the ground. Rayne lay on top of me, his shirt in tatters where two huge black dragon like wings had erupted and covered me. There was a huge bang and a flash of light. Around me I could hear the sound of heavy objects bouncing off Rayne's

wings. I had been quite impressed and was about to say so when I caught a glimpse of pain flickering across his face. Rayne had winced as a heavy flaming metal part of the car hit him. I didn't think demons could feel pain.

When the last thud sounded Rayne rolled off me getting to his feet not saying a word. I sat up, all around me was the flaming remains of what had been my Grandmother's car. I looked to Rayne and felt sick. His back was turned towards me and I could see the price he had paid to protect me. Great gaping wounds and burns streaked across his back, one of his wings hung at a peculiar angle dragging along the floor as he walked away from me.

"Rayne your back." I whispered almost crying.

"It'll heal in a few days." Rayne shrugged.

"But you're a demon. You don't feel pain, you don't get hurt. Why are you hurt?"

"My energy levels are low. I don't have enough to regenerate."

"But last night Loki restored your energy, he kissed you."

"His energy is not yours and burns out quickly."

I paused thinking this didn't make sense. Last night he had slept next to me, feeding off my energy levels he should have been replenished.

"But last night, you lay next to me."

"I didn't feed." He said flatly.

"What? Why not?"

"I didn't want to."

"Were you full?"

"I couldn't stand the thought of feeding off you when I could still smell those other men on you. It made me feel sick. You make me feel sick the way you are so casual with everyone."

"How dare you say that to me when you were the one who kissing Loki! At least I didn't want to be kissed by Rudolph."

"So this is my fault." Rayne demanded.

I felt like we were going in circles. He was mad at me for kissing Rudolph and I was furious with him about Loki- which I kept telling myself was completely irrational. But my heart was tearing apart seeing the blood and dirt dripping from him.

"Rayne," I said quietly. "Would you let me kiss you so you can get better?"

Rayne looked coldly at me, "No."

Chapter 25

Dark Black Magic: how I accidentally captured a demon prince- chapter 17- sorrow

Rayne POV

I walked away from Skyler.

I had to walk away.

If I turned back I would kiss her and then Hell would ensue.

Loki hadn't just turned up at the house to give Skyler an invitation to his Christmas ball, he had turned up to give me a warning.

"Rayne, seeing that you have been given a lucky head start in the race for Miss. Skyler affections I would say it is only fair that a injunction should be added to

even the odds," he told me grinning wickedly. "There must be absolutely no kissing. If you break the injunction then you break our contract and I will tell every demon from this dimension to the next who the prophesized witch is."

Loki had tied my hands behind my back. She wanted to kiss me and I wanted her so bad that every single cell in my body was aching for her. If I caved in then she would be dead by nightfall. I cannot protect in the state I'm in. I'm too weak.

Skyler called out after me. I had to cut her down. It was the only way to protect her. Gritting my teeth, she run to my side and I cordially faced her with an expression of disgust across my face. Skyler eyes scanned my wounds her beautiful eyes filling with tears, looking up at me she pleaded.

"Please Rayne. I know your cross but I can't stand to see you hurt."

I stood rigid as she inched nearer reaching up to touch my face. It was agony. I found myself immobilize watching her lean closer towards me, her eyes filled with such sorrow and sadness. For a

moment I almost considered letting her just kiss me, but at the last moment I pulled away. Staggering back I tried to think of the one thing that would crush her down so she would never tempt me again.

"Stop it," I said straighten myself up. "You're embarrassing yourself."

Skyler froze, "Pardon?"

"It's simply Skyler. I only wanted you when you were pure, but now all these other men are after you and Rudolph kissed you, I'm not into you anymore. You've lost that appeal. I blame myself for leading you on but I could never bring myself to kiss you. I'm a demon after all and you're a human. It would be like kissing a dog or a goat-"

"Stop," Skyler mumbled numbly. "I understand. Please don't say any more. I will never mention it again."

Forcing a fake smile I nodded. "Good! Well, I'll just go and call Kyle and Reg for a lift."

Skyler's head moved mechanically in agreement. Smiling I turned my back and mouthed every single

swear word in every known language in the entire history of the university. I felt like such a bastard. Behind me I caught the sound of muffled sob. I imagined turning around striding over to Skyler, holding her and kissing every single tear away until she stopped crying, but in reality I had no choice. I kept walking.

Skyler's POV

I never loved him. We never even kissed, but I felt like someone had thrust their hand through my chest and ripped out my bleeding heart and for some weird reason I was still alive and breathing. Rayne waltz off causally to call Kai and Greg dismissing me as some sub-normal species that he couldn't possibly be attracted to. Tears filled my eyes and all I wanted to do was curl up in a ball in the grass and die. Never in my life had I ever experienced an emotion so over powering and strong as what I was feeling right now. Bottling it up I lingered quietly under a tree until Greg showed up. Rayne got in the back of the van and I sat next Greg who cheerfully chatted away for the whole journey while I sat in passenger seat

staring out the window until we pulled up in my new home town. The town was a pleasant place with a typical pretty main street filled with the same stores you'd find in the local towns. There was nothing remarkable until we took a turn down a dingy rundown alley. The alley was small and dark with only a hand full of stores, half of which were boarded up or had a large, 'out of business' sign stuck to the window.

There was only one store that seemed open. A small wooden sign hung above a set of descending stairs reading 'the cavern.'

Greg stopped the car. "This is it."

The building was narrow but long at the side. There was no store window only a small staircase that leads down to a door. Greg helped a bleeding Rayne down the stairs, "Bea will fix this up." Greg chirped to Rayne.

I followed behind like a zombie.

Kai sprang out the door at this point, "You can see the store later I'll show you the flat." He said sounding bored.

Taking my arm he led me to the side of the building where a single red door was. He fidgeted in his pocket and pulled out an old fashioned rusty key. "Welcome to your new home." He said flatly unlocking the door and ushered me in. My heart sank. A narrow corridor that lead to a small double bedroom, a tiny bathroom and a room that was kitchen/dining/lounge area. The décor was faded, peeling and depressing. Forcing a smile I said to Kai, "How lovely."

Kai laughed, "I know it's shit."

He only meant it jokingly but I couldn't help it I burst into tears. Kai frowned, "What's wrong?" he asked.

"Sorry, I just miss home. I must be tired. Is it alright if I have a nap then I'll come down stairs?"

Kai looked suspiciously at me then nodded. He left quietly and I found the musty old bedroom and lay down on the bed and cried myself to sleep.

Chapter 26

Dark Black Magic: how I accidentally captured a demon prince- chapter 18- too late

My head was pounding as I fell asleep. The bed sheets smelt musty and old but there was this inconsolable sadness that had descended upon me the moment Rayne had shunned me. He said he didn't want me because that strange vampire had kissed me. That somehow made me broken inside. I didn't love him- so why did it hurt so much? I closed my eyes but there was no relief. Images of him floated in and out of my head.

I don't love him.

I don't love him.

I don't love him.

I could hear crying. Was it me? In the blackness I saw the girl crouched on the floor rocking back and fourth clutching her patchy head. Clumps of hair lay around. She didn't seem to notice me standing there.

"Are you having problems too?" I asked.

Still she didn't move.

I sat down beside her and placed my hand on her shoulder. I once read that a person touch is very therapeutic, a simply touch can make people feel better. A small bubble of light appeared out of the dark. It was small but very bright.

"Hey look." I said trying to grab her attention. The light glided through the air and swirled me and then landed on her shoulder where I had touched her. The light seemed to sink into her skin and immediately the girl stopped crying. The dark receded revealing an ordinary bedroom. The curtains were drawn, the bed was unmade and a clock flashed 19:15 in the corner. The girl sat up rubbing her eyes and called out, "I'm coming Mom!"

This was amazingly vivid for a dream. I watched as the girl got up and left the room. As door clicked too the room began whirl. I felt like I was being shaken. Drowsily I opened my eyes.

I wish I hadn't. Rayne was stood over me. As soon as I made eye with him, he stepped back. My heart gave a heave and I told it to stop being so stupid.

"How long was I asleep for?" I murmured.

"It's about quarter past seven." Rayne said.

"Oh my god! Your back!" I yelled sitting up straight. It should have come out as a question but it seemed to tumble out as something else. Rayne shrugged.

"Fine."

"Good. Oh and thank you for saving me earlier."

"Whatever. It's in my contract."

The words stung me and my mind went blank. Looking down at the floor I reminded myself- I do not love him. Suddenly the room felt like it was pressing in on me. I needed to get away from him. I

needed a break. Sliding out the bed I muttered, "I need to get some air."

Rayne grabbed my arm, "I'll come with you."

"No!" It came out more louder than I had wanted it. Forcing a smile and pulled my arm out of his grip. "No. Please don't trouble yourself."

Rayne's eyes froze over and for a split second he looked like he was going to say something. But then he shrugged. "Whatever."

I virtually ran out the corridor into the alley gasping for air.

"Greetings!" A tuneful voice sang. Turning I saw the vampire from the night before, Rudolph.

"You shouldn't be here!" I hissed at him.

"Poppycock! I've brought my best girl a housewarming gift!"

"You really shouldn't have."

"Oh don't be so modest! I can't have the prettiest princess in the land living below the poverty line."

"I'm not that poor."

"Do you have one Louis xvi furniture piece in your box apartment?"

"Uh, I don't think so..."

"Well that is below the poverty line."

I didn't believe him but I nodded in the vain hope that he would go away. Rudolph strode towards me holding out a gloved hand. I stared at it for a few minutes before he irritably grabbed my hand and kissed it.

"My gift will be coming tomorrow along with his team."

"His team?"

"I've had him flown in from Milan. He is the best designer."

"Designer? I don't understand?"

"Imagine extreme house makeover but up the budget by a couple of million."

"Million? Rudolph I can't afford fancy furniture."

"But I can and Gino will make this place into a palace."

"I don't know if I should except this."

"See it as compensation for that wonderful kiss-"

Rudolph didn't finish. He was lifted up into the air by an unseen force. A hand rested on my shoulder.

"Good evening Skyler, I hope this man wasn't bothering you for too long." Loki drawled eyeing up Rudolph.

"He wasn't bothering me." I lied.

Loki raised an eyebrow, "Really? Is he the man who kissed you?"

"Yes." I said.

Loki left my side and walked over to Rudolph. Leaping back Rudolph hissed at Loki bearing his fangs. Loki smiled and without touching Rudolph flipped him up in the air.

"Please watch this for future reference." Loki said striding over to me. In one fluid movement Loki grabbed my waist and pulled me into him. Numbness

flooded me. I had a horrible feeling what Loki had in mind. He whispered something in a language I had never heard of and leaned in to kiss me. I almost let it happen. But I saw him- Rayne in the reflection of a store window watching. His head bowed down and his body turned as Loki was about to kiss me. Was Rayne turning away because he couldn't bear to watch? My heart tripped and my hand flew to my mouth, covering it.

Loki blinked looking in astonishment.

Rudolph laughed. "She's crazy over me!"

Loki ignored him.

"Do you not feel the spark?" he said in low soft voice.

I shook my head violently. "It felt like someone was about to throw a bucket of water over me." I confessed.

Loki face looked puzzled but then broke out into a soft smile, "I'm too late. Congratulations Rayne."

"What?" I asked.

"You'll figure it out on your own." Loki said releasing me and then Rudolph. Rudolph fell to the floor with a loud clatter and bang. Rayne re-emerged out of the door way looking depressed. Loki yelled to him. "The deal off. She's all yours. I'm too late." He said.

Rayne's eye lit up and seconds later he had lifted me up off my feet and was striding towards our house shouting, "If either of you come snooping around here I'll kill you."

Chapter 27

Dark Black Magic: how I accidentally captured a demon prince- chapter 19- soul mates

Rayne POV

I stood in the doorway unable to move. In my head I kept repeating to myself 'she'll die if I intervene'. Loki pressed close to Skyler and I felt sick, every muscle in my body went rigid. Loki was going to kiss her. I couldn't watch. Turning my back to spare the heartache I was about to back into the house when I caught the whisper of an ancient language. Loki had whispered a phrase to Skyler, a phrase I had heard before. Suddenly it clicked, the night I had stumbled across Skyler house for the first time she was reading a spell out loud. The first part I missed because I

couldn't figure out the language but this end part I had managed to get.

Turning back I saw Loki being blocked by Skyler and I heard him whisper, "I'm too late."

How was this possible? The spell Loki had used were to seal souls together. But it wouldn't work because Skyler had unknowingly used it on me. But how was that possible? Skyler was human, her soul already had a predestined soul mate but then if that was true the spell wouldn't have worked on me. None of it made sense and none of it mattered because Loki was holding my soul mate.

Grabbing Skyler possessively I swept her off her feet and strode to our new home. Skyler had a puzzled expression on her face. God I wanted to kill Loki and Rudolph. Angrily I shouted over my shoulder, "If either of you come snooping around here I'll kill you."

Going inside I gently put Skyler down and slammed the front door. My heart was pounding. I had a soul mate. Demons were not to designed with love in mind. Our function did not require a soul mate so we

were never given one. The only way to acquire one was to either be rewarded one by some higher force or find a lone soul. A lone soul is about as common as a unicorn- they only exist in fairytales. My heart pounded nosily in my chest, I couldn't believe I had a soul mate. Skyler would be mine forever.

Turning to her I was greeted by an empty corridor. The joy drained from my face.

"Skyler?" I called out.

Her voice echoed from behind the bathroom door, "Go away!"

She sounded like she was crying. I ran to the bathroom door and pulled at the handle to find that she had locked. My heart deflated like a balloon. Pressing my forehead against the bathroom door I calmly said, "Are you going to let me in?"

"Never." She replied defiantly.

"I'll break down the door." I said restraining my voice.

"You can't. I've enchanted it."

"Why?"

"If you break down the door we will loose our deposit."

"Skyler I need you."

"Please don't lie. I know what I am to you."

"That's not true Skyler. Please open the door."

"No."

"Fine. I'll sit here and wait."

I grabbed a chair from the next room and positioned it next to the bathroom door. I would sit there all night if I had too.

Sorry it's short, I've come down with a bug and I'm feeling crappy T_T

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Chapter 28

Dark Black Magic: how I accidentally captured a demon prince- chapter 20- mixed emotions

Once the seed has been planted the roots will grow. Rayne had made it clear that he did not want me in that way and it had cut me deep. This morning Rayne had been cruel towards me, yet this evening his mood had done a three-sixty and now he was sat outside the bathroom door begging to let me in. I didn't trust him. As he banged on the door I pushed myself up against the furthest wall. The tears wouldn't stop. I couldn't stop crying. This was so confusing, what was wrong with me. I barely knew this guy but for some reason I thought of being without him terrified me.

"Skyler you can't stay in there forever." Rayne said.

I had no intention of staying locked in here forever but I didn't want a confrontation. My eyes wandered up to the small bathroom window. I could slip out. Get some fresh air. Quietly I tip-toed across the room and opened the window. Climbing up I squeezed through the tiny hole and dropped down into the dark alley below.

"Hello-"

I gagged Greg before he uttered another syllable. Pressing a finger against my lips I indicated for him to follow quietly. Sneaking round a corner into a well lit street, I turned to Greg who was examining my red puffy eyes.

"You've been crying." He said softly.

"Rayne's being difficult." I replied.

"You should get a demon exorcist."

"I can't."

"Why not? I know hundreds who would be willingly to dispose of Rayne."

"I don't want him to go."

"Skyler demons are dangerous. You need to get rid of him."

"I don't know what I need. I'm so confused."

"You need to get a demon exorcist. Rayne will never make you happy. He's pretty but he's not your soul mate. Demons do not have soul mates. If you keep him he will only ruin your chances of happiness." Greg said in a sombre tone.

Rayne was scary sometimes, he could do really sweet things but then he could do things that terrified me. People have nearly died because of me. Rayne almost wiped out that pack last night. Imagine if Greg upset me or Grandma- would he kill them too?

Greg sighed, "It is not in the nature of a demon to follow. Demonic nature is to control and oppress. Soon you'll have no control over him. Let me call my friends. They will come and dispose of Rayne and you can work off their fee over the next few months."

My throat tightened and so did my chest. The thought of Rayne leaving me made me feel anxious. I shook my head violently. "I need Rayne." I replied.

Greg looked disappointedly at me. "I can't make you but the offer is always open."

"Thanks." I smiled.

Greg gave me a hug and said goodnight.

The night air was chilly and I hadn't brought a coat with me. All this talk of exorcising Rayne made me want to see him. I needed to check he was okay. Opening the front door I saw Rayne at the end of the corridor slumped in a chair. He opened one eye and smiled. "You've come back to me."

"This is the only place to come back to." I said waspishly.

Rayne stood up, he was wearing his usual dark jeans and black vest top. My heart began to flutter as he walked towards me.

"I'm really angry with you." I blurted out as he reached for me. I stepped back against the front door. Rayne placed his hands either side of my head.

"You stink of troll." He said flatly inches away from my face.

"I slipped out the bathroom window to get some air. Greg was in the back alley."

"I we have to words with him about what he can and can't touch."

"That's not your decision to make, Rayne." I whispered. Rayne had stopped talking his gray eyes glanced up at mine then closed as he leaned into kiss me. Greg's warning echoed in my head. My body wanted him so badly but my mind panicked and I ducked.

Rayne's lips collided with the wooden door, his eyes flew open in surprise and looked down a me crouched down below. I expected him to get angry but he smiled like something was funny. "I was going to kiss you a few seconds ago." He said.

"I noticed."

"Do you like me, Skyler?"

"A little bit."

"Do you think I'm attractive?"

"What?" I stuttered.

Rayne knelt to the floor in front of me. Looking me straight in the eye he asked. "Skyler do you think I'm sexy?"

My mind froze. I didn't know what to say. He was gorgeous but did he expect me to admit it. He inched towards me then paused. For a moment I thought he was going to burst out laughing and make out it was one big joke but he didn't. Rayne paused and took off his top. My cheeks flared up and I said in a confused tone. "What are you doing?"

Rayne shrugged, "Isn't it obvious. I want you right now."

Chapter 29

Dark Black Magic: how I accidentally captured a demon prince- chapter 21- kiss

My back was against the door, I was slumped on the floor watching Rayne coming closer. There was no way I could runaway. I didn't want to run away but some little part of me kept chanting 'you can't loose your virginity like this'. The other ninety percent of me was screaming 'to hell with it''. Rayne was beautiful. The way his black hair flecked across his beautiful gray eyes. Those eyes were fatal. They would catch off guard and hold you. I couldn't move when he was staring at me, my mind would freeze overwhelmed by how beautiful he was.

"I know you're attracted to me." Rayne said kissing my shoulder lightly. "You're drawn to me." He whispered.

I didn't move. I was melting in his hands. I wanted to say something but my mouth had gone dry. His lips against my skin was like tiny sparks of electricity that made me breathless. I pressed the flat of my palm against his chest as a pathetic attempt to try and push him away but he came on stronger lifting me on to his lap. Then for the first time he kissed me. Time and space melted away and I found myself responding to him. My arms wound around his neck and kissed him back. The kisses were gentle at first then becoming more passionate. My whole body was aching for him. He lifted me up and carried me to the bedroom. My dress disappeared somewhere back there along the corridor and strangely I didn't mind. Thoughts of Rayne filled my head, his kisses were harder more possessive. I kept gasping for air unable to keep up. He carried me into the bedroom and laid gently on the bed kissing me. I noticed his jeans laying in a heap in the door way and sudden wave of panic hit me. It's like standing on the edge of black

void wondering whether to jump or not, not knowing what lay at the bottom. I stared up at the ceiling as Rayne kissed my neck, his body hard against mine. My hands instinctively ran through his black hair. Greg's warnings kept ringing in my mind but I couldn't imagine myself being with anyone else but Rayne. This didn't feel uncomfortable or awkward like I had imagined when I was younger. The way his skin felt against mine felt natural it was like we were made for each other.

Rayne lifted his head for a moment and gave me a look. I reached up and kissed him over his heart. "I love you." I whispered.

What happened next was a sharp pain followed by waves upon waves of bliss that built up to beautiful crescendo then sleep.

I woke up on Rayne's chest as the first rays of morning crept in. Rayne was still asleep looking like angel. For the first time since Grandma left I felt really happy. Creeping out of bed I gathered up the trail of clothes we left behind and left his folded neatly on the side. I took a shower grabbed a fresh

change of clothes and left him a note saying I had gone to work.

Smiling I stepped out the front door and locked up. Greg was already outside position a sandwich board sign outside the store. He glanced and beamed, "Hello Skyler! You're in a good mood!"

I couldn't help but smile- I was in love.

The rest of the morning passed in a blurry haze. Greg showed me around the store and introduced me to Bea. He showed me every item the store stocked and how the cash register worked. I served several customers and advised on what to buy. People remarked how happy I was. I couldn't help smiling to myself when I thought about Rayne. I had never felt like this about anyone in my life. I felt super happy, nothing could ruin my day! Not even Loki and Rudolph.

The afternoon went well too. When it came to close up Bea came up to me. She looked worried and concerned.

"Greg just told me you've got a demon as a pet." She said.

I felt my happy bubble begin to sink. "Rayne's not a pet." I said.

"You should get rid of him. Demons are unpredictable and dangerous."

I wanted this conversation to end right now.

"I'm fine with Rayne." I said and quickly changed the subject.

Suddenly the store bell rang and a customer wandered in. She was a middle aged woman wearing a fur coat and heavy perfume that hit that back of my throat and made me want to gag. Bea looked at her fur coat with a disgusted look before yelling, "Skyler, customer!"

I walked over to the woman who was examining an Ouija board.

"Can I help you?" I asked politely.

She glanced at me in a way that made me feel inferior. Glumly she asked. "Do you have rabbit paws?"

I opened my mouth to speak but Bea intervened. "We do not sell that sort of stuff." She said flatly.

The woman pursed her lips and walked out the store. Bea groaned. "We get a lot people trying to buy animal parts from us. We never sell them. I hate people who use animals alive or dead in their magic. I always make it clear we are not that type of store."

"That's nasty." I agreed.

Greg appeared, "Time to lock up folks." He said jangling the keys.

I couldn't wait to see Rayne.

Kai emerged from his back room. "Can I go home yet?"

"Give me a second to cash up." Greg replied.

Bea grabbed my hand smiling. "I'm so happy you're here! You've been brilliant today."

Greg agreed. "You haven't stop smiling all day Skyler. I think this store suits you."

"I was thinking that too!" Bea laughed.

Happily I replied. "I'm just in a really good mood today!"

At that moment Kai looked directly at me and said. "You slept with him didn't you?"

Chapter 30

Dark Black Magic- Chapter 22 ~arguments~

The atmosphere changed. Bea, Greg an Kai waited for my response. Words failed me and the awkward silence proved my guilt. Kai said nothing. He didn't have to; his expression said it all. Bea shook her head. "Skyler, what are you thinking?"

Greg was far angrier; he slammed his fist against the counter. "Damn it Skyler." He yelled.

I couldn't believe how judgemental there were being. I wanted to defend myself but what was a convincing argument for my actions? I wish I could show them how Rayne made me feel; then they would understand. But to Greg, Bea and Kai, Rayne was a

demon and therefore a danger. At least their concern was coming from the right place.

Looking at each one I said. "I appreciate your worry but Rayne isn't that bad."

Greg did not believe me. He swore under his breathe and said. "Are you blind? He nearly killed Aidan and his stupid pack!"

"He was provoked!" I countered.

"Rayne threaten me when I tried to hug you."

"But you're still alive. Calm down!"

"Your Grandmother asked me to look after you. How am I going to explain her precious granddaughter is screwing a demon?"

"That's taking it too far. What I do in my personal time is none of your business." I said picking up my coat and heading for the door.

Greg called after me. "Skyler wait."

I was so mad right now all I wanted was to leave. Stopping in my tracks I turned to face Greg. He rested his hand on my shoulder and said. "I don't want to

see you get hurt. If I didn't care about you I wouldn't have got so mad."

"I understand but Rayne isn't all bad. He can be very sweet when he wants to be."

Greg's face twisted as soon as I mentioned Rayne's name.

"Today was great. You did really well. I'll see you tomorrow." He said unlocking the door.

"Thanks Greg." I replied.

I walked out the door up the stairs and into the alleyway. Rayne was waiting by the front door of our apartment.

"Hey." He said opening the front door for me.

"How have you been?" I asked kissing him on the lips as I walked past.

"Missing you. Do you have to work?"

"We still need to pay the rent and utility bills." I said soberly.

I walked into the kitchen and hung my coat up. The sink was filled with dirty washing and I noticed a plate table filled with what I can only describe as steaming neon goo. Rayne liked to cook, but he was terrible at it. I forced a smile and said.

"You made you dinner."

"I didn't know what you liked to eat so I threw a bit of everything in there."

"Thanks."

Rayne disappeared out the room for a second and I quickly scrapped half my dinner into the trash can before he came back.

"How was your day?" He asked.

"Great. Everyone was really nice."

"They didn't give you any grief over me?"

"A little but they don't know you yet."

"I doubt they'll ever want to befriend a demon."

I didn't argue with Rayne; instead I said that I had eaten enough. We washed up and decided to go grocery shopping.

"Shame we don't have Grandma's old car anymore." I said wondering how we would manage.

"Ah- yes I was going to talk to you about that. I found a car."

"Really? How much is it?"

"That's not what I meant. There was a car I liked so I took it."

"You stole a car?" I yelled!

"Technically yes and no. It was on the garage forecourt up for sale. I spoke to the manager and he gave me the keys. Then I fogged his memory so he thought I had brought the car from him."

"You did what?"

"We needed a car and now we have one."

"Rayne you know that's not the problem. You stole a car and you are going to give it back."

"I plan to as soon as we can afford to buy another car."

"No way mister. You are taking the car back to the forecourt right now." I folded my arms across my chest trying to impose a sense of authority. Rayne softly laughed under his breathe and lifted my chin up. My heart began to flutter.

"The car stays. Stop worrying yourself baby." He said leaning down to kiss me. I turned my head refusing to kiss him and he stepped back irritably ruffling his hair.

"Skyler," he groaned. "Don't bust my balls over this car. Not after last night. I've been thinking about you all day. Waiting for you too come home." His hands splayed over my waist and he pulled me against him. I fought the temptation to give in. Rayne didn't make it easy. He started to kiss my shoulders and his way up to my neck and murmured against my skin. "Give in to me."

Taking a deep breathe I replied. "No."

Rayne stopped immediately pulling away. He looked angry, confused and rejected. Swearing he snapped. "Fine." He grabbed his coat and stormed out the front door slamming it hard.

Chapter 31

Dark Black Magic: chapter 23 ~house guests~

Sorry for the wait- I had good reasons so please believe me!! Thanks for all your wonderful messages!! I do read them so keep them coming!! Angeltwist XxXx

Last night I did 'it' with Rayne, for the first time ever. This morning I was convinced I had made the right decision but after today's events I'm not so sure. Today was my first day at work and some how the people I worked with managed to guess that I had gone all the way with Rayne- a demon. They were very angry with me especially Greg my boss. I was so upset when I left work but when I saw Rayne across the street waiting I was so happy. Even that was short

lived. Rayne confessed he stole a car for me. We had an argument and Rayne stormed out the house slamming the door behind him. The whole day had been awful and now I was wondering if I had made the right choice last night. Greg warned me about Rayne, he said that Rayne was dangerous and I didn't want to believe him but now I'm having doubts. Small doubts that I could probably forget if everyone stopped badgering me and Rayne started acting like a civilised human being- I hope. Either way I'm feeling pretty sorry for myself.

Depressed I head into my bedroom and flop down on the bed and start to read a book. I had finished the first paragraph when a loud bang rattled the front door. Putting my book down I opened the door. A very large stout woman with no neck and a bright red perm stood on my doorstep.

"Darling!" she cried forcing her way into my home, blowing a kiss in my ear as she passed, "Rudolph has told me all about your circumstances darling and I'm here to help! Francois, the charts!" she barked. A slim grey haired man dressed in dirty brown robes

appeared from thin air carrying a large leather bound book.

"Who are you?" I said confused as the woman shook her head and tutted at my wallpaper.

"Dreadful darling, dreadful. Paper on the walls is very provincial. Francois will make it nice- if he knows what is good for him." The woman shot the man a dark look and continued further into the flat, "Very hokey darling. Tsk-tsk."

"Who are you?" I asked again.

"Greta Cochon, darling but every one calls me Piggy darling," She laughed grabbing Francois by the scruff and throwing him into the kitchen, "Sort out that mess Francois."

Piggy? What kind of a nickname was Piggy and more importantly why was she in my house.

"Excuse me, what are you doing here?" I asked.

Piggy blinked for a second at me as if I was madwoman.

"FRANCOIS!" Piggy charged into the kitchen and grabbed Francois by the ankel and dragged him back into the corridor. Pulling him to his feet Piggy said, "Francois, tell little missy here who Piggy is?"

Francois hesitated weakly muttering, "But the charts.."

"NEVER mind your wretched charts!" She yelled rattling him by the foot.

Sighing he said as if he had said it a thousands times before, "Miss Piggy is the greatest interior designer to have ever lived. She has decorated the likes of palaces, temples and now your home."

"Good boy, Francois." She smiled flinging him back towards the kitchen.

"Rudolph sent you, I remember him saying something about a house warming gift."

"Good darling- Oh my gawd." She said fixated at something behind me.

Rayne had walked in through the door. He glanced at Piggy then at me waiting for a reasonable explanation.

"This is Piggy, she has come to make over our apartment. Rudolph sent her." I said watching the nerve on his jaw line twitch at the mere mention Rudolph's name. Rayne pointed to the front door and said, "Get ou-" Suddenly Rayne was silenced. A sausage like finger had rested upon his lips. Piggy whispered, "Hello darling. You're very handsome and I'm very rich would you like to my husband- well husband number 9." Piggy reached into her bra and pulled a wad of cash and waved it under Rayne's nose.

"You like it eh? You see more if you dancey dance." Piggy said.

Rayne was actually backing away from the amorous advances of Piggy. I watched in horror and hilarity as Piggy slammed the front door before Rayne could escape out. Francois suddenly poked his head through the kitchen door, "Miss. Piggy the charts are done..."

"You idiot! Why are you trying to ruin my seduction!" Piggy charged at the kitchen door and Francois slammed the door shut. She banged on the door furiously yelling "FRANCOIS!"

Rayne pulled me against him like a human shield and muttered, "Help me."

If only Greg could see Rayne now, I smiled to myself.

Piggy threw a few insults at the door and turned to face us. Rayne held me tight his arms wrapped round my waist. Piggy studied us for a second, her beady eyes focusing in on our embrace.

Rayne said weakly, "This is my girlfriend."

Piggy heaved a sigh of disappointment.

"We are going to get married one day." Rayne added.

I quickly snapped "No-" but Rayne clamped his hand over my mouth.

Piggy snorted, "Well darling when you get bored- and you will. Here's my card." She said and placed a calling card down on the table and winked at Rayne.

"Now my darlings I must leave you," she announced, breaking down the kitchen door and picking up Francois by the scruff of his robes. "I shall be back in week time to implement my grand design! Come Francois!" she huffed dragging the poor man out of our house by his beard.

Rayne slammed the door shut.

"I'm going to kill Rudolph." He said.

"We need to go to the store."

"Did you see they way she looked at me?"

"Her eyes undressing you, imagining what you would taste like..." I replied trying not to laugh.

"Ha-ha. Well, the car is gone so can I have my kiss?"

"Shopping first. Make out later." I said walking into the kitchen looking for my coat.

"Looking for this?" Rayne said standing in the doorway holding my coat.

I go to take it but he moves the coat out of reach. Leaning over me he says, "Kiss me."

Heat rushes into my cheeks. I make a irritable groan to try and sound annoyed. Quickly I kiss him on the cheek and pull away but he stops me.

"I want a proper kiss." He demands.

I lean forward to kiss him...

"Evening!" Greg parades into the house accompanied by Kai and Bea who are holding pop corn and soda.

Bea smiles, "The door was open."

Kai says flatly, "We brought a movie."

Greg flashes a DVD entitled 'Psycho Bear 3: Smokey's Revenge- extreme blood edition!'

"Aw thanks!" I smiled.

Rayne looked scathingly at me.

Twenty minutes later we were sat on the sofa munching popcorn and watching a homicidal bear with a machete kill campers. Rayne was clearing not enjoying the movie. He took everything way too literally.

"A bear cannot physically grasp a machete!" He said as Smokey hacked off a limb of a Japanese tourist.

"He's not any old bear," Bea said, "He's Smokey."

"This is ridiculously unrealistic! Bear's can't talk, why is he taunting his victims?"

"The mad scientist in 'Psycho Bear 2: Smokey's Return', replaces Smokey's voice box with a serial killer's voice box after Smokey falls off the cliff at the end of 'Psycho Bear: Smokey the Killer Bear'." Bea explained.

"I've never seen the first two movies." I said.

Rayne gripped my hand and squeezed it tightly- I think he does not like Smokey.

Happily Bea smiles, "I'll bring them over some other time! I love Smokey the bear! I always dress up as him for Halloween!"

The evening passed drama free. I was happy Greg had made the effort to come and see me after our quarrel today although he and Rayne did occasionally give each other dark looks through out

the movie. After the film we chatted while Rayne skulked about in the kitchen until they went home.

I went and sat on my bed. I picked up the book I was reading when Piggy had interrupted.

Rayne appeared in the doorway. He had been oddly quiet while Greg, Kai and Bea had been over. He leant against the door frame arms folded against his chest. I put down my book and asked, "Do you want to talk?"

"Why the hell would I do that?" He snapped, pulling his black t-shirt over his head and throwing it on the floor.

"It might make you feel better." I said weakly.

"So you're a shrink now?" He said sarcastically.

Rayne sat on the bed next to me. He picked up my book and flicked through a couple of pages, "This isn't magic." He said tossing it carelessly to the side.

"I enjoy working with plants and nature" I snapped.

"I could show you how to conjure storms that will rain fireballs and blood-"

"No."

"Why?"

"You know I hate that stuff?"

"I am that stuff. I am a demon. Why do insist on making me act like a human!"

"Because I don't want you to hurt anyone- especially with blood and fireballs!"

"You would condemn me to a life of solitude before breaking your own stupid human morals."

"Shut up and stop whining. Is this about the car?" I asked puzzled by his weird out burst.

"To hell with the car! Why didn't you want to kiss me earlier on?"

"What?" My eyes widen and heart fluttered. He was angry because I was too shy to kiss him?

"I waited all day for you, Skyler. I've wanted you all day." He said.

I can't explain what it feels like to hear those words. My whole body goes into meltdown to the point you

can no longer think. All you can do is feel. He crawled next to me and said, "Please don't make me beg."

Stephanie Collins POV

I had no hair. The last of it fell out into the sink last night. Mom cried. I did nothing. I had nothing. I had stopped going to school because the panic attacks were so bad. I thought staying at home would help the situation but it got worse. They sent me text messages, emails, and posted messages across my social pages. They cut out a picture of my face and stuck it onto obscene pictures and uploaded it up onto the website along with my name and cell number. I switched off my cell and stop checking my emails. I was so frightened, I wanted to die. They had robbed what little humanity I had left in me. Staring at my reflection I did not recognize myself. I was a ghost. My step-dad Brad wanted to send me to some Hollywood rehab clinic- I told him no. There was nothing left of me to save. Days were beginning to blur together and I felt like a marionette, pretending to be alive while being dead inside. The doctors

called it depression, anxiety, and other names and they gave me tablets that made me feel numb. They were supposed to make me feel better.

With each day that passes I feel a piece of me slipping away. Soon I will be nothing but a shell of the person I once was. There is no hope. I don't want to carry on living anymore.

Chapter 32

Dark Black Magic~ chapter 24 Aidan's return

Stephanie Collins POV

I wrote a letter to my mom and Brad explaining everything. I left it placed on my pillow for them to find in the morning. I took off my shoes, my jeans and my hoodie and put on a thin cotton dress I wore to the beach last summer. Opening the window a cold rush of air blasted against my body penetrating through the cotton. The freezing bite reminded me that I could still feel in the most basic sense. Climbing carefully out of my window I descended down the trellis into my back garden. Running bare foot across the lawn I passed through the back gate into the forest and I ran. Pebbles and stones cut into the soles

of my foot, brambles scraped against my bare skin and tore the hem of my dress. Shivering I ran through the cold November night until I was too frozen to move. I slumped against a tree

Every waking moment feels like a small part of existence that should have been used by someone else. As time progresses I see how I do not fit into this world and how I can never be truly apart of it. I am useless at everything. The harder I try the more I fail and no one notices except me. This doom that started within me like a seed has grown thick roots and sprang up like a mighty oak consuming whatever humanity I had left. Do you know what it is like to feel the blackness and sadness? I can't remember my life without it. This cold that cuts me to the bone reminds me that I once was alive and hopefully after tonight I will live again and leave all this sadness and dark alone. This is a world I am not compatible with.

Skyler POV

Two o'clock in the morning I'm listening to the steady rhythm of Rayne's heart trying drown out the howling of the wind outside. A winter storm is

blowing over from the west. Wriggling deeper into the duvet, Rayne heaves a sigh, "Can't sleep?"

I freeze looking up at him, "Sorry, the wind is noisy."

"You use to live up a mountain side."

"The sound of the wind use to bother me back then."

Rayne pulled the sheets around us and muttered, "I had a dream about that stupid troll."

"Greg's not stupid."

"He had kidnapped you and I followed him into his lair. You were tied up and when I went to free you, you turned into Piggy. Then the dream turned into a nightmare." Rayne shivered.

I burst out laughing.

"I can't believe a mean old demon would be frightened off by Miss. Piggy."

"That woman scares me Skyler. She wants to eat me."

"She wants to cuddle you and toss you about like a sack of potatoes."

"Did you see her servant? Francois? Poor wretch."

"That could be you, Rayne, if you play your cards right."

"I sooner go back to hell."

The room fell silent, but it wasn't that weird sort of awkard silence when no one knows what to say. Rayne and I were happy. After a few moments Rayne asked seriously.

"Do you know anything about your mother or father?"

I didn't answer immediately. The question threw me a little. I rarely thought about my parents. I knew nothing about my father, apparently my mother didn't even know who he was. Grandma thought he might an old boss of my mother's. I didn't really talk about them because there was nothing much to say.

"Not much. My mother was this wild child and Grandma thinks that my father was one of her ex-employers. It's hard to tell which one, Mom drifted." I said.

"When was the last time you saw her."

"Probably when she left me with Grandma- I was a few days old."

"That's harsh."

"She's never been in my life so there isn't much to miss. What about you? Do you have parents?"

"My family is complicated."

"I'll try my best to understand."

"The realms of the otherworld are home to many different species. My mother was a mixture of many species, angel, incubi, siren, to name a few. My father was something else, much older. I inherited my power from him and thus why I was made a prince of Hell because of him."

"Was your father the devil?"

"God, no. I think my father's even older than him."

"Do you ever see your parents?"

"Sometimes. Although family life is different down there. We don't do holidays or family reunions."

"Did you have a home in Hell?"

"I had a palace but I wouldn't call it a home."

"Do you miss Hell?"

"My home is here with you." Rayne said gently kissing the top of my head. I smiled and snuggled against his chest.

"Who will replace you in Hell?"

"I don't know and I don't care. Hell is not my concern anymore."

"Do you think the devil will be mad?"

"No. He's always coveted the human ability to love. He wouldn't be mad. He would probably be jealous. Demons rarely find a soul mate."

"Am I your soul mate?"

"Obviously you are Skyler. I wouldn't be here otherwise."

"I love you. Forever." I said sleepily.

"I know. Now sleep." He replied.

I fell asleep to the sound of his heart thudding in his chest. I was so happy.

The next week flew by. Work was interesting and Greg, Bea and Kai all started to warm up to Rayne, although Greg really only tolerated Rayne. They came over the flat a couple more times to eat popcorn and watch b-rated horror movies. Bea had a weird fetish for blood and gore. Greg and Rayne were cordial to each other and would sit through the film occasionally giving each other dirty looks. I found out that Kai was in a local rock band and played at the bar on a Friday night. He invited Rayne and I to a gig next week. Rayne wasn't too happy but I was really excited. Life was going great, until the Monday morning.

The room went deathly quiet. The store door had clanged open and Aidan had walked in. Bea grabbed my hand and shoved me into Kai's back room.

"I want to talk to her." Aidan snapped loudly. Greg positioned himself in between Aidan and me. Smiling like Greg always did, he politely said, "Skyler's on break. I can help you out with whatever stuff you need."

Aidan snorted and pulled himself up onto the crystal counter, "I want her. I will wait for her."

Greg smile faded. "I'm sorry Skyler is going to be a while."

Aidan shrugged.

Awkwardly I stood watching Greg and Aidan having a stare-off competition. Aidan had made it clear he would not go until he had spoken to me. Giving up I finally said, "What can I do fro you Aidan."

Aidan smirked triumphantly pulling out a wad of cash from his jacket pocket and handing it to Greg.

"I'm hiring you for the day."

Chapter 33

Dark Black Magic~ Chapter 25- Curious Item

Skyler POV

I stood gripping the motorbike helmet. Aidan groaned throwing his hands in the air,

"I swear." He repeated.

I looked suspiciously at him and his mobile death trap. Solemnly I replied, "Swear on your life?"

"I swear on my life I will drive carefully." Aidan repeated.

"You better because if Rayne hears about that." I muttered placing the helmet on my head. Aidan sat impatiently on his bike waiting for me. As I

clambered up onto the back of Aidan bike he grabbed my hands and placed them around his waist.

"Hold on tightly." He hazard revving the bike.

"You better drive like I'm your goddamn grandmother. Go nice and slo-"

My sentence was drowned out by the roaring of the engine. Aidan flew out the side street like a bat out of hell, cars on the main road swerved to avoid hitting us. We hurtled up the main street onto the road out of town and into the forest. My stomach lunged into my mouth. I closed my eyes tightly gripping Aidan's waist tighter. I was going to kill him when I got off this bike. The wind roared around my ears with the occasional angry honk of car horn breaking the noise. I opened an eye to check out the scenery.

When I had just got use to Aidan breakneck speed driving he did the unexpected and veered off the road into the forest along a muddy dirt track full of bumps and holes. My breakfast churned inside of me as I was tossed from side to side on Aidan's bike.

When we finally stopped and I had to take off the helmet and run to the nearest bush. After I had finished puking my guts out I angrily yelled at him, "I told you to drive like I was your Grandmother!!!"

Aidan shrugged, "My Grandmother taught me how to drive like that."

We wander through the woods together along a dirt track. Up ahead were a groups of people hanging around, some of them I recognised from the night Aidan attacked me. They whispered amongst themselves as we past except for a sharply dressed lady who flew at Aidan.

"What are you doing bringing humans here!" She yelled.

Aidan snapped, "She's a witch."

"And now she knows the location of your home."

"Oh shut up Nadia."

"I want to speak to you now."

"It can wait."

"I've come all the way from the city to see you Aidan! Have you even seen the state of shoes! I've ruined my favourite shoes to come and speak too you."

"Why didn't you ring me?"

Nadia didn't respond she was too busy examining the state of her Italian leather shoes.

"Look at this mud!" she yelled at Aidan.

"Shut up woman. Go back to the city." Aidan whined pulling me past her.

"That was my cousin Nadia, she is one of the heads of our pack in the city. Most werewolf clans have abandoned to the forest to live in the city."

"So you check up on each other from time to time." I asked.

"Something like that." he said distracted as a group of his buddies came towards us.

"Here boss." One said handing Aidan a cloth parcel. Aidan dismissed his gang and dragged me out of ear shot.

"This is what I want you to do for me," he said unwrapping the parcel, "I want you to destroy this."

Out of the parcel tumbled a leather strap with a large buckle. It was too small to be a belt and to large to be a necklace or even a bracelet.

Taking the object I asked, "What is this?"

"Are you an idiot or something? You're the witch, you should know."

"Pretend I don't."

"This strap is made from the skin of hanged men to give ordinary human beings the extraordinary power to change into a wolf." Aidan explained.

"Is that how you turn into a wolf?"

"No. I was born this way. To protect our packs and our people, my kind seek out these straps and destroy them. Ordinary human beings have no control of their werewolves selves."

"Are you scared that innocent people might be hurt?"

"Don't be ridiculous. If some human goes terrorizing the town with this baby, then will have slayers,

hunters, angry mobs with pitch forks coming after us. A few weeks back my cousin heard that a pack were slaughtered by hunters because some kid from the local town brought a wolf strap on the internet I thought it would be fun to wear it to prom. The humans never suspect their own kind." Aidan sneered.

"That's awful."

"Children, even babies were shot dead."

"I'm so sorry."

"Don't be. Just destroy this. Only magic can destroy this." Aidan folded the strap back into the cloth and handed it to me.

"I'll make sure that is destroyed."

"Good. I wish I could offer you a lift home but Nadia is expecting me. Town is that way." Aidan pointed in a direction.

"Whoa, wait one second mister! You can't expect me to walk all the way back!"

"Why did you think I hired you for the day? If I was going to give you a lift back then I would have rented you for the morning."

"You rotten flea bitten mutt! If you weren't going to give me a lift back then why didn't you bring the stupid strap to the store."

"Pfft, I wanted to see you puke." Aidan shrugged walking back to camp.

Picking up the hem of my skirt I began to wade through the undergrowth. My cell phone was back at the store so I couldn't even ring Kai or Rayne for a lift. I like walking but not when there was a storm forecast. Rayne is going to kill Aidan when I tell him about this. After a couple of hours the sky begins to darken with rain clouds. Anxiously I glance up at the sky anticipating the first rain drop. Town must be close now, I can hear the distant hum of traffic and sirens. Suddenly my foot catches on a log, and I hit the floor. The wolf strap falls out of my hand on to the floor and rolls down an muddy embankment. Cursing I ran after the wolf strap as it rolls and tumbles across the floor then stops by a body.

I screamed. I don't know why, but the shock hit me along with cocktail of adrenaline and fear and I screamed. I screamed Rayne's name. He was the first and the last person I needed right now. The wind around me picked up then above me branches splintered and snapped. Rayne dropped down beside me, pulling me against him looking for a threat.

"It's okay, I'm fine!" I said.

"I've been looking for you everywhere! Greg called me and said Aidan had kidnapped you-"

"Rayne, haven't you noticed?" I asked amazed he hadn't noticed the body.

"What? The girl?"

"She's dead." I said tearfully.

"No she's not. I can hear her hear beating."

"Oh my god, she's alive."

"Yeah, she's just suffering from exposure." Rayne shrugged like it was no big deal. I whacked his arm, "Just exposure! We need to get her to hospital."

"It's too late for a hospital. Human medicine wouldn't cure her. I can fix her up."

"Then fix her."

Rayne hesitated for a moment then leaned over her and pressed his hand against her throat. The girl took a massive gulp of air. Color flooded back into her cheeks. She sat up and looked around, "Am I dead?"

Chapter 34

Dark Black Magic- chapter 26- lost soul

Stephanie Collins POV

I can't justify with words how depression makes me feel. I suppose 'hopeless' is close, but even that does not embody the crushing awareness that I am no longer the same person I once was. As I lay dying on the forest floor my last thoughts were ones of disappointment. In my head I believed that death would end the suffering and I would be able to reclaim the girl I once was. But I was still the same in death as I had been an hour ago. A lost soul wanting to be found. Death had been a disappointment and it's darkness I waited for angels or a bright tunnel of light to lead me to Heaven. Floating in the darkness I

saw shimmer of light. I felt cold- freezing in fact. My lungs expanded filling my chest with air. For some reason my body was waking up. I opened my eyes too see two figures hovering over me. Was this heaven?

"Am I dead?" I asked.

But before they could answer I passed out again.

When I came too again, a bright light was shining in my eyes. Was this light Heaven? Maybe it was God? I reached out to touch it, "Jesus?" I asked as I touched a red hot surface. Swearing loudly I cradled my burnt finger tips.

"What happened?" A female voice called.

A flat male voice replied, "She thought the a 100 watt light bulb was Jesus."

"For christ sake Kai, get that lamp out her face!"

The overhead light moved and I saw five figures stood around me. This must be a hospital. Squinting I sat up and stared at the medic next to me. He was

blurred and hazy but I could make out the black shirt he was wearing.

"Lie down." He said pushing but on to the bed.

"Are you a doctor?" I asked.

Everyone in the room let out a snort of laughter. I looked back up at this guy and realised his black shirt had a large rock band logo on it. This was not a hospital, and I was too sore to be dead so where was I. Shuffling back up the bed, a girl came towards me. She was about my age and had a kind angel-like face.

"We found you in the woods and brought you back here to my home. My name is Skyler."

Awkwardly I replied, "I'm Stephanie."

"Please to meet you Stephanie." she replied cheerfully.

A wave of panic hit me. My hands began to tremble. I couldn't cope with strangers and social situations. I hated everyone staring at me. I wonder what they are thinking of me. Do they know I tried to commit sucide last night. My breathing became more erratic

and my heart hammered in my chest. Skyler touched my hands, but I flinched away. I had to get out of here.

"Thank you for helping me. I must go now." I said.

"You can barely walk." Skyler replied.

"I'll be fine." I stood up and nosedived towards the carpet. Someone grabbed me from behind before I hit the floor.

"Hey take it easy. No one is judging you," a soft male voice said, "You're safe here. My name is Greg."

"I want to go home." I protested.

"Your parents are coming to pick you up right now." Greg smiled.

That was comfort, although I wasn't looking forwarded to explaining why I was missing. I just keep digging the hole deeper for myself! Shit. I wanted to cry.

Skyler sat next to me and softly said, "I know you've been having a hard time with yourself and I want to

help you. We would all love it if you visited all us at our store."

"Really?" I asked.

Greg patted me on the shoulder, "Sure! You can even come to Kai's next gig with us. Us weirdoes have to stick together."

I didn't know how respond. Part of me was so desperate for human contact but the other part wanted to runaway. Deep down I realise only I could heal myself but I was too afraid to take that step. I needed change, even if I had to force it, things could no longer continue this way. I couldn't keep hiding.

"I will come and see you again, although I don't understand why you want to be my friend." I said honestly.

Skyler shrugged, "I think we would be good friends."

I didn't believe her.

Skyler POV

I watched Stephanie's parents big 4x4 drive away. I wanted to help that girl so badly. Greg, Kai and Bea

wanted to help too. Rayne seem less keen. In the kitchen I could hear Greg and Rayne discussing Stephanie. Everything sounded pretty causal until I heard Greg yell, "Are you out of your freaking mind!"

Oh god, here we go. Another argument.

"Boys play nice." I groaned.

"Tell her what you have done!" Greg snapped.

Rayne had that look on his face. That 'I've done something bad' look. I was hoping it would be something silly that we could all laugh off but judging by the expression on Rayne's face it was serious.

"I told you her body was beyond medical repair." he said.

"And?"

"So I broke a few universal laws to bring her back to life."

"What do you mean."

"Humans abide by laws of physics. We abide by laws of magic. By bringing that girl back from the brink of

death I have allowed her to break the natural law she in which she exists."

"Meaning?"

"By bringing her back from the dead I have made her immortal." Rayne said.

The word immortal echoed in my head as I stood perfectly still facing Rayne. He tried to wrap his arms around me, but I pushed him away.

"You did what?"

"Skyler honey, baby-" Rayne said reaching for me. I darted around the kitchen table, "Explain to me what happened!"

"I brought Stephanie back to life and now she is immortal. It happens all the time. A vampire bites a human, the human dies and comes back vampire. A werewolf bites a human the human dies and comes back a werewolf. The only exception to Stephanie is that I did not bite her and infect her. So she comes across as immortal."

"What does immortal mean?"

"She can't die- well she can but she is really hard to kill."

"Did you think about mentioning it to me before you saved her?"

"Yes it did cross my mind. But I did not think you would care."

"Oh course I would care about making a suicidal teen immortal! Do you not understand the huge implications!?!"

"So you would have let her die?" Rayne snapped.

Running my fingers through my hair I shrugged, "I don't know."

Honestly I didn't know. Leaving her to die would have been awful but to force to live when she longed for death was also cruel. I only had myself to blame. Stephanie was my responsibility now.

"I'm sorry Rayne. It's not your fault." I sighed moving around the kitchen table. Rayne reached out for me, "I can fix it for you." he said innocently.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"If you want her dead..."

"No, that's not what I want."

Rayne kissed my forehead, "We'll figure it out."

"We need to keep an eye on Stephanie." I said.

"Why? It's not like she can hurt herself anymore."

"She is hurting from the inside Rayne."

"Fine, I'll keep an eye on her." Rayne groans.

"Thanks!" I smiled.

Chapter 35

dark black magic: chapter 27 fat dave

Rayne POV

Skyler flitted around the store completely unaware of my presence. The last couple of days I had felt like I was invisible to her. All she did was hang around with her new friends and worry about that Stephanie kid. It made me feel bitter inside. I was never good at making people and demons understand me so I didn't know how to get her attention. Dissolving out the store in a fine mist I travelled through the town into the local library. My great idea was to use the library's computer to get relationship advice- the only flaw to my plan is that I've never used a computer in my life. Hell had been untouched by the

digital revolution. I walked into to the library and saw a long table with computers lined along it. Passing the front desk I headed to an empty computer.

"Excuse me?" An elderly woman's voice rasped. "You must sign this form to use our machines."

Irritably I scrawled my name on her wretched paper and headed to my computer. Sitting down in front of it I poked at the screen. Serveral people gave me an odd look. This is harder than it looks- how do I get onto the internet? I leaned towards the monitor and whispered, "Internet, please."

The screen turned black then a large message reading 'library' scrolled across the screen. This wasn't working. Impatiently I drummed my fingers against the desk.

"Hey, I can show you how a computer works."

I looked up and saw a teenage girl grinning at me.

"Thanks, I'd appreciate it." I replied.

The girl clapped her hands, "Only on one condition though- you have to buy me lunch."

A fair exchange, I thought as I nodded my head.

"My name's Judy, what's yours?" The girl said sitting down next to me.

"Rayne." I replied.

Judy giggled weirdly, "Is that your real name?"

Why did humans find it so hard to believe Rayne is my real name? Suppressing a groan I nodded and Judy responded with a sharp squeal.

"That's so cool!" she exclaimed hammering on the keyboard.

"A name is a name." I shrugged.

"Oh totally."

"Whatever."

"So what do you want to know?"

"I need to know how to impress a girl and dating ideas." I said.

Judy turned bright red and her eyes seemed to glaze over. What was wrong with her?

"You don't need to ask a website for advice- you could just ask me." she replied fluttering her lashes.

I opened my mouth to ask her a question but the librarian interrupted me.

"This is a place of silence!" She snapped like a some nun in a chapel.

Judy rolled her eyes and grabbed my hand, "Let's go somewhere more- personal."

She lead me out the library to a seedy café across the road. A broken neon sign flickered in the window 'Fat Dave's Grill'. Fat Dave was behind the counter flipping burgers with a cigarette hanging out his mouth sprinkling ash across the food.

"Don't order the burgers." Judy whispered as we sat down at the table. I wasn't intending on eating any food on the premises, I could hear several coakroaches scuttling about in the kitchen. A tired waitress approached the table and gazed over her note book at me. Her eyes lit up and color tinged her

cheeks. She quickly tucked a loose wave of hair behind her ear, "Hey there! What can I get ya?" She beamed at me, totally ignoring Judy.

Judy sharply coughed drawing the waitress' attention to her, "Could we have two chocolate shakes and two slices of strawberry cheesecake."

The waitress pressed her lips together slightly annoyed and darted off. Judy watched her with baleful eyes then turn her attention to me. "Dumb waitress is old enough to be your Grandama!" She snapped.

I didn't know what she meant nor did I care to find out. Bluntly I cut through the chitchat and said- "I want this girl to fall in love with me and I want her to fall hard."

Judy's eye widen and her breath slowed. Gawping at me she replied, "I think she already has."

"Really? We haven't known each other long-"

"Time is meaningless when it is 'the one'."

"I know but it happened so quick to both of us, I frightened that our realationship is already fizzling out."

"No, no. I know in my heart that it is strong so strong!"

The waitress came with our shakes and shot me a smile and a wink before leaving.

Judy clasped her milkshake, "I never had a boyfriend before," she stuttered, "I never dreamed I would ever have a boyfriend."

"How lovely. What's a good idea for a first date or a gift." I said uninterested.

"A romantic boat ride out on the lake and then in under the moonlight a gold locket that symbolizes our love."

"Sounds a good idea- Skyler would love that."

"Who's Skyler?"

"My girlfriend."

Judy stilled. Her doe eyed expression disappeared as her eyes narrowed and her face hardened. "I bet you

thought that was really funny! Men are jerks!" She snapped grabbing her shake and flinging it at me. Chocolate milk dripped down my face as the entire café stared at me. I felt embarrassed for the first time in my life. Looking round the café I could see people smiling and laughing at me- the great demon prince. My temper flared and without even hesitating I said in a demonic voice, "Mention this to anyone and I will eat your souls."

I didn't mean it but it was good enough to make everyone in the restaurant run out in panic and fear. Even Fat Dave made an attempt to haul himself over the counter. He soon gave up and hid behind the counter. Skyler would be angry if she found out so I left a large sum of cash on the table to cover the bill and any damages.

"Sorry." I said as I left the café and headed to the jewellers.

Girls were weird- it wasn't just human girls, demonic women were like that too.

I turned the into the jewellers and sensed the presence of another demon. Loki- another Prince of

Hell who had tried to steal Skyler away from me. Admiring a diamond encrusted watch Loki chatted pleasantly to the jeweller. I stood staring at him wondering if he had noticed me.

"Rayne, darling, don't stand in the door way and pout." Loki said.

I hated him. I wanted to kill him. He was a threat to Skyler.

"What are you doing here?" I said.

"Enjoying the little real life soap opera this town has to offer- did you know Mr. Willis here has a one on one bible study with Reverend Grimes every Friday night."

The jeweller, Mr. Willis jaw dropped. Loki winked at him.

"And I know you don't really study the bible and that's why you're going to give me this watch and Mrs. Willis will never find out about your dirty secret."

Willis shoved the watch at Loki.

Irritably I snapped, "What are you doing here?"

Loki admired his diamond watch, "Did you know Skyler's brother is in town looking for her?"

Chapter 36

dark black magic: chapter 28: dramatic turn of events

Skyler POV

The letter sat face down on the door mat. I picked it up and noticed the airmail mark stamped on the envelop. Grandma had finally sent me a letter. Tearing it open a small wooden talisman fell out the envelop accompanied by a letter. I picked it up and put it in my pocket. I had waited so long to hear from my crazy Grandma who had decided to move to Wales on a whim.

I had just got back from work when I noticed the letter. Today had been somewhat slow. Bea and I had decided to clean out the store room which was

disgusting. I swear there was spiders as big as dogs in that store room. Greg said the spiders guarded the shop from burglars but I think he was joking. Rayne did not show up today either which kinda disappointed me. I liked when he turned up out of the blue. I suppose he is busy with demon stuff.

Sitting down I began to read my Grandmother's letter,

"Hello there darling!!

How are you chicken, it's me Grandma! I'm having a great time in Wales! I have so much to tell you! I've been staying with a hedge witch in Camarthan and she has given me an excellent recipe for fertility which I have included in my letter- I want great grand babies before I die. How is that dear boy Rayne? When are you two tying the knot? Speaking of tying the knot I have some news that will shock you. I met someone, a warlock called Odgar. He's a retired postman living in one of the local villages. I met him on a nudist walk- yes I know what you are thinking, shameless Grandma. Even seventy year olds need to cut loose one in a while. Me and my girls

'the blue rinse brigade' went out on the razzle one night. I can't remember what happened but when I woke up I found out I had signed up for a naked ramble. Well I wasn't going to go until Mrs. Higgs showed me who would be leading the ramble- Odgar. He is younger then me by a decade or two but we hit it off straight away. He makes me feel 17 again. Anyway the wedding is next week, then we are going to Scotland for our honeymoon. I hope you get to meet Odgar one day. I've made you a protection charm to put under your pillow. Take care chick pea!

Love from Grandma xxx"

The letter fell from my hands. Grandma is getting remarried. I couldn't rationally explain it but I felt sad and angry. After she left I felt lost and alone in this world, Rayne has helped a lot but it has been had. Grandma is all I've ever had and the fact she could abandon me and move on with her life so quickly really hurt. I picked up my cell phone and sent Rayne a text- I really need you- I wrote. Tearfully I walked into the kitchen and begun making a relaxing cup of camomile tea. Just as the kettle had

boiled the front door had opened, I could hear Rayne moving towards me. I turned to face him and I felt something heavy and solid smack against my temples. A white light flashed across my eyes followed by blackness.

Matthias the Demon Exorcist POV

The witch fell against me. Dalton, my assistant, and I had been watching the witch and her demon lover for days waiting for the right time to strike. The witch had foolishly left the front door unlocked, it had been the first time she had made such a mistake on my watch. Dalton was outside with the vehicle ready. I carried the unconscious witch out the house in to the quiet back alley. The sun hurt my vampire eyes even though it was twilight. Dalton open the trunk of the car and I threw the witch in to the back. Hastily we got into the car and sped away from the area.

"Right then boss," Dalton said drumming is hands on the steering wheel. "We'll drop the girl off, collect our bounty and get the hell out of here."

"No." I said firmly.

Dalton looked puzzled at me, "Boss we done the job, let's get rid of the girl."

"I want to use her first. Head towards the forest, we don't have long."

"What are you planning, your highness?"

"I'm going to use her as a lure. I want to send her demon boyfriend back to hell."

"I don't think that is a good idea, he's not like those other low class demons. He seems more powerful..."

"Do you doubt my abilities?" I snapped at Dalton.

"No your highness."

"Then go to the forest and stop calling me your highness. I'm not a Prince anymore."

Stephanie Collins POV

My hair was growing back. I noticed the new strands poking through this morning in the mirror. Ever since those people found me in the forest I have felt different. My body does not feel the same. I feel stronger, faster, quicker, my senses are heightened

and I don't feel pain, hot or cold. What has happened to me?

Last night was the first night I actually had a dream since my depression. I was in a garden talking to girl called Mia. She seemed to know me very well even though I had never met her before. She told me strange things about vampires, demons, werewolves and trolls. It was so strange and fascinating to listen about all these stories the pain inside of me disappeared for a little while. Mia told me the pain would eventually go but I had to keep fighting and believe in myself. Emotionally I felt to tired to fight and I couldn't help but feel like a complete and utter loser. My parents were so mad when they picked up from the store. I've let them down so many times-

Just then my train of thought was interrupted by a tapping on my window. Suddenly I panicked, was it the girls from school here to torment me? I ducked under my desk and closed my eyes. The window rattled even more.

"Go away." I whispered.

"Good evening mademoiselle." A smooth voice purred from out of the darkness. I opened one eye and saw a handsome man wearing an obscene amount of crushed velvet. My mouth fell open, was he a hallucination?

"Allow me to introduce myself, I am Rudolph of the imperial royal household."

Oh god, my psychiatrist warned me that this would happen. The depression has manifested itself into psychosis- I'm mad. The man smiled charmingly at me.

"Are you going to come out from underneath that desk?" he enquired.

I shook my head.

"Is there anyway I can persuade you?" he asked.

"Go away." I replied.

"That would be counter-productive my dear. I have come here to talk to you and you only."

"You're not real."

"I'm very real I assure you. Would you like me to prove it?"

Before I could reply Rudolph crouched under the desk placed his hands either side of my head and kissed me . His lips were solid, his palms were cold, this was definitely not a hallucination. Pulling back he smiled, "Kissing is so much more genteel then a pinch or a slap and I never turn down the opportunity to kiss a pretty girl."

I stared up at him. This had been the first time I had ever been kissed- ever and I had to admit it was quite nice. There were no fireworks or shooting stars between the stranger and I but it had been nice. Shocked at myself and this stranger I said, "Who are you, what do you want."

"Do you have the memory of a gold fish? I already said that I am Rudolph and I what I want is a talk with you. But I'm not doing it under a desk."

I got out from underneath the desk and faced Rudolph, "What do you want and why did you kiss me?"

"You ask a lot of questions," Rudolph sighed. "I want to ask you for your help."

"My help?" I almost laughed, I was a useful as a chocolate tea pot.

"Skyler saved your life and I need your help to return the favour."

"I don't understand."

"Skyler was kidnapped by a vampire bounty hunter."

I laughed, "Vampires don't exist."

Rudolph smiled seductively, "Yes they do, would you like me to prove it?"

"Please do." I said.

Rudolph walked over to me lifted up the edge of my t-shirt and rested his hands on my bare flesh waist. His palms were suddenly warm. Leaning into me he kissed my neck. I didn't protest or pull away. For some reason I wanted this. Rudolph pushed my t-shirt over my head and I tugged at his ridiculous clothes. He lifted me up and carried me to my bed and lay me down. It was so nice these weird feelings

I didn't want it to end but there was a small part of me that kept wondering why did he keep kissing my neck. I felt his teeth scrape across my neck then there was a sharp pain followed by a dizzying rush of pleasure. Rudolph was drinking from me while making love to me. It was a bittersweet feeling that I couldn't explain, it kept building until it peaked like a crescendo. I lay on the bed feeling hazy as Rudolph rolled off of me.

"I can never resist a pretty girl." he sighed.

"That was my first time." I said feeling disappointed with myself. I could have waited for someone who loved me- but then again he was a really hot vampire.

"We all have start somewhere." he said nonchalantly.

This vampire obviously had no romantic feelings towards me which to be honest was mutual. I got out of bed and went into my bathroom and inspected the marks on my neck- they were almost healed.

"Do vampires have some magically healing agent in their salvia?" I asked.

"No. It's a side effect from being immortal." Rudolph said.

"Immortal?" I asked.

"You don't know do you?" he said.

Chapter 37

dark black magic: chapter 29: to be an immortal

Stephanie Collins POV

I stared at my reflection and at the two faded puncture marks that scarred my neck.

"What do you mean immortal?"

"My dear you are not of living anymore nor are you dead thus have fallen into the category of supernatural being. I am a vampire. Skyler is a witch. Rayne is demon. The demon brought you back from deaths clutches and in doing so changed you into immortal." Rudolph replied as he lay naked on my bed watching me as prodding my bite marks.

"But I wanted to die!" I cried out.

"Well Rayne has just made that task impossibly difficult for you to achieve."

"I don't understand."

"Come now ma chere. This is a confusing time for you and sadly I lack the time and patience to comfort you. Once we get Skyler back she can explain everything to you."

"I still don't understand all of this. Vampires, immortals, witches and demons."

"That is to be expected."

"You really don't care."

"No but never mind- the show must go on. Now I need your help."

"Sorry Rudolph but I having my own little personal crisis here. Find some one else to help you."

"I can't. Only you can help me. Only you can save Skyler's life."

"What's happened to Skyler?"

"It's so tragic! She was kidnapped by two strangers!"

"Oh my god- do they want a ransom?"

"They are going to kill her."

"We need to call the police."

"The police cannot help us. The kidnappers are not human."

"So how am I suppose to help?"

"You harbour an untapped power that will save Skyler."

"I have a power?"

"Something along those lines."

"Seriously?"

"Yes and we need to get going now so put some clothes on." Rudolph said hastily.

Closed the door of the bathroom to shut Rudolph out. God he was irritating- pretty but irritating. I stared at my reflection the puncture marks looked like hickies. Grabbing some concealer I did my best to hide the marks. I wasn't to proud of myself for having a one

night stand with a guy who turned out to be a complete ass. Why did I let myself get so carried away? Stupid Stephanie, I snapped at myself pulling a pair of jeans on and a t-shirt.

I came out of the bathroom to find Rudolph immaculately dressed in a completely different outfit I had pulled off of him.

"Are you ready?" He asked.

"Yes." I nodded.

Rudolph opened the window then grabbed me and jumped down to the ground with a heavy thud. A sleek black sports car was parked on the street.

"Is that your car?" I asked.

"Obviously." He said opening the door for me. I slid into the plush interior and sank into the car seat. This was so cool. Soon we speeding out of town towards the forest.

"Where are we going?"

"An abandoned logging mill in the forest." Rudolph replied.

Rayne POV

I left Loki the moment I received Skyler's text message. When got home the front door was wide open and the scent of a stranger filled the air. Walking into the hall I called out for Skyler. The apartment was silent. I walked into the kitchen and noticed a baseball bat tainted with blood. My heart leapt into my mouth. I run out into the alleyway sucking in the air. Large black wings burst through my t-shirt as I took to the skies scouring ground for clues.

I bet Loki had something to do with this. Damn bastard! What the hell did he mean Skyler's brother is in town? Skyler has no brother. Loki had to be up to something. He wanted Skyler to be his mate even though she was mine.

I could not sense her presence in town so I flew out towards the forest. Scouring the forest I could not sense her anywhere.

Crimson wings flitted past me, "You won't be able to sense her." Loki said flying along side me.

I grabbed the lapels of his black shirt and threw him off balance, "What have you done with her?" I demanded.

"Temper, temper. Don't go jumping the gun Rayne- this kidnapping business is nothing to do with me." Loki said as I dove towards the ground.

"What do you know?" I said.

"I'm not telling you anything with that sort of attitude."

Snapping I grabbed one of Loki scarlet wings and dragged him high up in to the clouds.

"Tell where Skyler is or I'll break you wing and leave you to free fall." I knew the fall wouldn't kill Loki but the impact would hurt like hell. Loki rolled his eyes and pulled out a letter from his pocket.

"When you darted off I came to your house looking for you. Typically you had already gone without looking for clues."

Loki gave me a letter written by Skyler's Grandmother. I scanned the letter looking for clues

then raised my eye brow up at Grandma's plans to remarry but beside that there was no hint or clue to Skyler' whereabouts.

"This is useless." I snapped as Loki grabbing his wing again.

"The words are not important, smell the paper." Loki urged me.

I sniffed the paper and recognized an all too familiar scent.

"Yew wood. Her grandma gave her a talisman made from yew- great. No wonder I can't find her."

"It's probably a rune."

"Shit, I bet it's the Eoh rune."

Runes were an ancient alphabet that was sometimes used for magic and divination. Each symbol of the alphabet in runic magic has a special power and meaning. The Eoh rune is used for protection and banishing against evil spirits like demons. If Skyler had that rune on her she would be cloaked from Loki and myself.

"Great." I sighed.

"Haven't you made friends with the locals- can't you ask them?" Loki was reffering to the three half wits, Greg, Bea and Kai.

"The troll won't be able to sense it. Kai has no magical talent. Bea could she's a fairy. I guess Stephanie could as well now she is an immortal."

"Woah, hold up- did you say immortal."

"It was an accident Loki."

"No one gives Death the middle finger accidentally! I'm surprised he hasn't caught up with you yet."

"Death is the last person on my mind."

"So who is it going to be, the immortal or the fairy?"

"Stephanie is sick so guess it will be the fairy." I groaned.

"What's wrong with the fairy?" Loki asked.

Chapter 38

dark black magic: chapter 30: the change

Skyler POV

I could feel his presence reaching out to me in the darkness.

"Rayne." I said softly. I wanted to scream but everything came out as soft hushed barely audible whispers. My head was throbbing in agony, the pain penetrated through my unconscious rousing me. I was laid on my side against a cold we concrete floor. The sound of running water echoed around the room occasionally broken by the hooting of a night owl. How long had I been out? What had happened?

Slowly I lift my head up and look around. Blackness. I couldn't't see even see my own hand. I sit up.

"Don't move." A male voice orders. A hand pushes me against the floor.

I don't move. Footsteps pace around me.

"Slut." the voice hisses.

Ice cold water pours over me and the sound of an empty bucket clangs loudly against the floor. Frightened I callout for Rayne. This angers the man even more and a hard blow is delivered into my stomach. I double up in pain gasping for air.

"Dirty little bitch," he spat at me. "Sleeping with a demon and dirtying your soul!"

Curling up into a protective ball I say nothing.

"I've been watching you." he says. "When your boyfriend comes I am going to kill him."

"I'd like to see you try," I snapped unable to contain myself, "He's a demon, you can't kill him."

My kidnapper let out a humourless laugh, "I can and I will kill him, like I have slain so many of his kind. I

possess the blade of Hades. A sword that kills mortals and immortals alike. I have come to cleanse this world of demon scum like Rayne." The voice said.

"Why? Not all demons are bad-" I snapped.

"The demon has seduced you to believe his lies."

"Demons work in Hell that doesn't make them bad- it's just their job-" Before I could finish another word my kidnapper deliver another kick, this time the back of my leg. My calf scrapped across a sharp objects and I felt warm liquid ozzing out my leg. Tears of pain burned in my eyes. I inhaled sharply between the waves of pain. My breathing had suddenly become very painful.

Matthias the Demon Exorcist POV

My vamprism had it advantages. I could see the girl with absolut clarity in the pitch black. She lay on the floor curled into a ball breathing hard. Perhaps I had kicked her too hard? Something was wrong with this picture but I couldn't tell. My nostril's flared catching the scent of something tangy and coppery. Fangs burst out inside my mouth. Blood. The very thing I

loathed and desired most in the world. I could see the crimson stream seep out from beneath her leg. Suddenly my starvation was beating at me, my body was crying out for me to drink. To take her blood and satisfy my hunger. Kneeling down I gently touched her leg. She immediately flinched. Softly and kindly I said, "Let me look at your wound."

For some inexplicably reason she moved her leg and allowed me to examine the wound- stupid girl. The gash in her leg was deep. It was agony. The blood, the sound of her heart pounded in my ears. I couldn't resist. I bent down, firmly grabbing her leg and sank my teeth in. She might of screamed or yelled, but I didn't notice. The whole of my body was rejoicing as I drank deeply. Moments passed and the girl stopped struggling. Her heart was slowing. I knew I was going to kill her, but I couldn't stop myself.

Suddenly a light switch on and I heard Dalton opening a door. He must of saw me feeding because he yelled at me to stop. Forcing myself I stopped and pulled away. The girl looked white almost gray, her

lips were purple blue and she was breathing very lightly.

"What have you done?" Dalton yelled at me.

I stared down at the girl unable to comprehend.

"You've killed her!" he snapped.

"She's not dead yet." I said weakly.

"Give her another thirty seconds." Dalton said sharply.

I panicked. Biting my wrist I tore it open.

"What are you doing?" asked Dalton alarmed.

"Saving her." I replied, pressing my wrist against her mouth. Blood oozed into her mouth. She tried to spit it out but I forced her to swallow my blood.

"This is madness." Dalton muttered.

The girl's pale complexion brightened and the wound on her leg sealed shut. Her eyes fluttered open.

"What's happened to me? What did you do?" The girl asked in bewilderment.

"I saved you." I said coldly.

"What's matter with me? I feel different." she said.

"You are different, Skyler. You are a vampire now." I said bluntly.

Chapter 39

dark black magic: chapter 31: the meeting

Skyler POV

My body felt light and airy like it wasn't real. The last thing I remembered was a terrible pain my leg followed by weakness. What had happened to me? I was laid in a field full of flowers, sunshine and bird song.

"Does it hurt?" A female voice asked.

I sat up and saw a pregnant woman standing before me in deep crimson gown.

"Who are you?" I asked curiously wondering how on earth I had got here.

"Aidan entrusted you with a very special item." She said softly ignoring my questions.

The memory flooded back. Aidan had driven me to the out skirts of town and gave me a leather strap that gave its wearer the power to turn into a werewolf. Aidan gave it to me to destroy it but I had dropped it. It tumbled down a muddy embankment and I ran after it and stumbled across Stephanie on the verge of death. I forgot all about it. I never picked it up.

"I forgot to pick it up." I said horrified with myself.

"And I found it." The woman replied the edge of her mouth tugging up into a cruel smile.

"What did you do with it?" I asked.

The woman didn't reply she looked away smiling to herself. I repeated the question but she did not answer. Instead she picked up the hem of her crimson gown and walked away from me gently wrapping her arms around her bump.

"The child that grows inside of me has been prophesized to end the age of the humans.

Unfortunately you Skyler has been prophesized to stop him. I can't let you do that."

"So why not kill me now?"

"Do you know who you are? Your heritage?"

"No. My parents abandoned me when I was young, my mother didn't even know who my father was."

"Grandma has been telling you lies. Your mother was a fantastic witch. Favoured and adored by the Gods themselves and loved by one God in particular. Your mother eloped with a God, she fell in love with Death and had fraternal twins. You are one of those twins Skyler. Your brother remained in the afterlife to become a Prince while your mother gave you to the world. She probably foresaw my son's uprising and sent you to stop it. Clever little witch. So do you understand why I couldn't just kill you upfront. Your father is Death. I couldn't touch you. But then something extraordinary happened. Matthias your brother was bitten by a vampire and suddenly Death disowned his own son. So I figured if you turned into a vampire Death would disown you too. My poor child you have no idea the lengths I have gone to

ensure your downfall. My plan is still incomplete but I soon the next stage of the plan will be revealed and you will learn there is a betrayer in your company. I know this is a lot to take in but in a few moments the pain of your transformation will kick in."

Hot white pain seared through my body, I screamed out in agnony.

"I was hoping the transformation would hurt you, Skyler. I want you too hurt so badly. You're turning into a vampire. Poor little baby. The girl nobody wanted except dear old Grandma. I saw your Grandmother last night. Did you manage to read her postcard before you were kidnapped? I suppose you did. The wedding was today. Pity she didn't live to see her reception."

Tears ran down my face, I couldn't even breathe. I stared helplessly up at this strange woman who smiled,

"She was killed in tragic accident. Mauled to death by an animal. You should have taken better care of that wolf strap." She sighed.

I rolled over in pain. I cried out to Rayne. Was this real or a trick. The woman grabbed my hand and forced an item in to it.

"If you don't believe me, believe this." She said looking down at the object. My body was convulsing. The sunshine was burning my eyes. I couldn't breathe. Darkness eroded the picture perfect set and the pain ebbed away. Was my Grandma really dead?

Stephanie POV

The old mill loomed ahead. Rudolph stopped the car.

"You're on your own now." He said casually leaning back into the driver's seat. My eyes widen and my mouth gawped open.

"Are you shitting me?" I snapped.

"What a peculiar expression, but no I am not 'shitting you'. Someone somewhere in that building is wearing a talisman that prevents demons from coming near them. So even if I wanted to come in there with you I couldn't."

"So how the hell am I going to rescue to Skyler."

"You have a unique power so to speak. Go and discover it." Rudolph said drearily. I can't believe I slept with this loser. I raised a disbelieving eye brow and exited the car. Great how the hell was I suppose to rescue Skyler. I had no guns or special ninja training or magical powers that could help me. All I had was my own two hands. I walked to the old mill and studied the building trying to think what a spy would do in one of those action movies. I moved around the building and found a staircase. I headed towards the staircase but almost screamed as the bushes nearby rustled and a young man really good looking guy stepped out. Stunned I stared at him- was he one of the kidnappers?

He smiled at me and in a goofy voice said, "Hi, I'm Aidan."

"Hi Aidan," I said unenthusiastically. "Um I'm a forest park ranger and this is a restricted zone you have to leave here now."

"You're eyes are pretty." he smiled.

I blinked at him. What the hell was wrong with this dude? Aidan took a few steps towards me, "I'm really

glad you came here, I've been watching you staring out your bedroom window at night. You were always so sad."

Oh my god, he's a pervert stalker- a good looking pervert but a stalker never the less. Putting my hands on my hips I said firmly, "Aidan you are going to have to leave immediately. That is a super special forest ranger command that has to be obeyed."

"I can't leave you like this." he protested.

"Yes you can."

"But I have been waiting for this moment all my life."

"Are you taking the piss?" I snapped.

"No. I know this is hard but I need you to understand that I am the only one for your. I knew that the first moment we met. I'm so happy I finally get to meet you." His eyes were like a puppy dog's.

"Love at first sight is corny idea made up for valentines day."

"Wolves know who their other half is the moment they lay eyes on them. I knew Skyler would help you get better."

"You know Skyler?" I asked.

"Yeah."

"Can you help me?"

"Anything you want, just tell me and I will give up my life for you."

"Help me rescue Skyler."

"Sure! No problem. Wait here I'll get my pack."

I watched in amazement as Aidan turned into a wolf and sprinted into the forest. When he said wolf I thought he was some kinda of freak with an identity crisis but I guess he really was a wolf like Rudolph really was a vampire. Just at that moment Rudolph appeared at my side.

"See, that boy is your magical power." Rudolph said.

"I don't understand." I said.

"That is the alpha male of a pack of werewolves. He has identified you as his one and only mate and will protect you until his last breathe."

"No way! But I never laid eyes on him before."

"You don't need to meet. A simply glance is all it takes."

"So you are telling me that Aidan is my soul mate?" I said sceptically.

"Yes- so better not tell him about me popping your cherry."

"Do you have to be that crude and it's not like Aidan is my boyfriend." I snapped feeling disgusted with myself.

"Whatever- just tell him when I am not in the vicinity."

I rolled my eyes and watched Rudolph slink off back to his car.

Chapter 40

dark black magic: chapter 32: new beginnings

Matthias POV

Dalton paced the room. His eyes darted between me and Sklyer. His face flipping between anger and worry. The change was done. There was nothing else to do except wait for the girl to wake up. A small voice in the back of my mind whispered- then what? Would she come will us? Would I release her back into the world after killing her lover? I slayed demons while she was in love with one. Skyler had become a huge liability.

Dalton finally broke the silence. "She was our bounty not your dinner." he snapped at me.

A pang of guilt stabbed at me but I pretended not to care. Why had I let my self loose control? Her blood was irrestible- all human blood is irresistible. The smell is the same as looking at a big cold glass of water with ice cubes on a really hot day. The urge is primal. Gently I stroked Skyler's black. Shrugging I replied, "She's alive."

"She is not alive! She in undead." Dalton said.

"But she isn't dead Dalton. For god's sake stop being so over dramatic."

"Our client will arrive at any moment! And they are going to know you have been munching on her!."

"Stop comparing me to an animal."

"Well, you are behaving like one. Your father would never-"

"Stop- right now!" My voice bounced off the walls. Dalton stood rigid, he knew that he had gone to far. We never talk about my father- not since he exiled me.

The hate still filled me with rage- why did he turn his back on his only child? I was born to a human mother and to Death himself. A creature made of both worlds able to live amongst the humans and amongst the dead. I was a Prince of the underworld attending court and parties. My life was care free and easy. Then one day while I was visiting the human world I was bitten. When the vampire bit me I was still a teenager, imagine how terrifying that was. There was these scary changes within me that I had to deal with while being homeless. Dalton and I had gone from spoilt royalty to homeless teens living in cardboard boxes. The cold did not touch me, but Dalton felt it. I can not begin to describe the hate and confusion I held towards my father. I was his only child and he disowned me because I was a vampire. There is no way I can cure my vampirism so I'm hoping to prove to my father that I am not a monster by slaying monsters. I would never beg for his forgiveness but I will show him. The demon scum that inhabit this world must be slain so that I can go home. Picking up my blade I swung it through the air.

"When Rayne shows up"

"Do you have to swing that thing around in here!" Dalton said.

"Relax- I can't hurt myself." I replied. Which was true the blade was magic. It would kill all except me. The blade could never cut me, if I tried it would simple pass through me like a ghost. A very clever sword indeed.

"Show off." Dalton muttered.

"Stay here." I said to Dalton as I heard footsteps and noise outside.

The mill was surrounded by people, I could people chattering and arguing from outside. I soon recognised Rayne's voice. Quietly I crept into the shadows and waited for my time to pounce.

Stephanie POV

Rudolph smirked at me as Aidan appeared out of the bushes with a group of ten werewolves. This guy was supposedly my soul mate- according to Rudolph the vampire I had just slept with. Suddenly all the problems I use to worry about had been eclipsed by these two guys. Honestly I wasn't feeling very

romantic tonight. Aidan was out of luck he approached me eagerly.

"Me and my gang will deal with these kidnappers. Stay here. I don't want you getting hurt." Aidan said standing close to me. I inched back uncomfortable with a boy being this close to me.

"Don't worry, my friend Rudolph is here. He'll look after me." I said cheerfully.

Aidan puppy dog eyes flipped to cold menacing wolf eyes. His whole expression changed and it scared me. Subconsciously I took a step back. Aidan snatch my arm and dragged me towards him.

"There is a word for that creature-" Aidan said glancing at Rudolph, "And that word is pervert. Stay away from him."

Um sorry Aidan, the warning's come a little too late, I thought to myself. To keep the peace I nodded and agreed to stay at least twenty feet away from Rudolph. Aidan seemed satisfied with this.

Just as Aidan and his merry men were about to storm the watermill loud drumming of wings filled the air. I

looked up and saw Rayne and another guy carrying Bea. Rayne was flying? They landed on the ground and Bea run over to me.

"Are you alright? Has that mongrel bit you?" Bea shot an accusing glance at Aidan.

Rayne ran over to me, his wings folded behind his back.

"What are you doing here with him?" He demanded.

Sheepishly I replied, "Rudolph said Skyler needed help."

Rayne eyes narrowed on the car behind me, "Rudolph." he spat between his teeth.

I heard the car engine starting as Rayne walked towards the vehicle. Rudolph threw me wave and drove off at stop speed down the path creating lots of noise.

"Great. They'll know we are here." snapped Aidan.

"And why are you here?" Replied Rayne.

Aidan defiantly folded his arms across his chest and shrugged, "What's it to you?"

Rayne didn't reply, he just stared at Aidan then grabbed my arm and started dragging me away from Aidan. Immediatley Aidan jumped forward grabbing my arm. Rayne stopped and the two stared at each other again.

Exhausted I snapped, "This is not tug-of-war!"

Aidan reluctantly let me go. Rayne shoved me towards his friend and said, "Loki, take care of her."

"Okie dokie." The stranger Loki replied .

Rayne turned back to Aidan, "There is no point storming the place, Rudolph has already announced our presence. They will be out soon enough."

Aidan signalled to his werewolves who fell back.

"We will wait in the forest and then ambush them." He said.

Rayne nodded curtly and then walked over to Bea. I was left with Rayne's friend Loki. He was smiling at me and I felt my tummy do a little flip, "Hi." I smiled.

"This place isn't really suitable for a young lady." He said catching my hand and bringing it to his lips.

"No, not really." I said breathlessly.

"Shall we go somewhere else?" He asked.

I wanted to say yes but then I remembered why I was here. Skyler was in trouble and I had already let her down once today. I couldn't run off with Loki or Aidan in these sort of crisis. Why I was I behaving so badly? Loki smiled edging closer to me.

Taking a breather I stepped back. "Sorry not tonight." I said calmly.

Loki shrugged, "There is always tomorrow."

Skyler POV

The pain that burned through me was indescribable. Immobilized I could do nothing but endure this agony. Was I really turning into a vampire and was Grandma really dead? I kept praying that this was all a bad dream and at any moment I would wake up. But it couldn't't be a dream, dreams weren't't painful. The pain intensified and I was gasping for breathe. Suddenly a cool hand pressed against my forehead and the pain ebbed away.

"Hello duck." Grandma's voice said cheerfully.

"Grandma, help me. I'm turning into a vampire." I replied.

"I know, but you still got your talisman on you."

"What does that mean?"

"Your body is not transforming into a vampire- it is rejecting the change."

"Huh? But that lady-"

"Knows nothing about real magic."

"So, I'm not going to turn into a vampire."

"Your body will resist the change as much as possible but you may pick up a few traits."

"But I won't have to drink blood or sleep in a coffin?"

"No."

"I'm so glad you're here Grandma, that lady said you were dead."

"She was right about that." Grandma almost laughed.

My whole body went numb.

"You're not serious. Grandma I need you."

"Sorry honey I wish I could stay but I have to go and explain to your Grandpa, that old coot, why I ended up dying on my wedding day."

"Grandma don't leave me."

"I knew that your mother would twins. I also knew what you and your brother would have to face. So I decided to give the both of you special gifts. I gave Matthias a sword to slay demons. Then I gave you Rayne."

"But I bound Rayne to me by accident."

"I set it up. The spell was my doing. Rayne will protect you in my place and so will all your friends."

"But I'll miss you. Please don't leave me."

"I have to go now duck. Remember who you are and never compromise that."

Blackness fell over me.

The noise from outside was so loud it grated against my ears. Stephanie, Aidan, Loki, Bea, Rayne and some other people were outside making hell of a

noise. Drowsily I picked myself off the floor. Did I fall out of bed? Where was I? I remembering having a weird dream but there were big black gaps in my memory. The room was dim, but I could see surprisingly well. This wasn't my bedroom. There was boarded up smashed window in the corner. Fragments of glass littered the floor, and in one area I noticed- well actually I smelled blood. How weird was that? Blood didn't smell. But I could actually taste it in the air. I called out to Rayne, but he didn't respond.

"I feel strange." I muttered to myself trying to find a way out of this place. Deep heavy breathing cut through the air and turned to see a young man with a lead pipe walking towards me. The free hand was pawing the air as if it was pitch black. As he walked towards me I took a side step and let him walk past me. Who the hell was he?

"Skyler? Where are you , it's me Rayne!" The stranger said impersonating Rayne. Nervously I stepped back and headed towards a door on the adjacent side.

Quietly I opened the door and slipped through. The night air was cool against my face and the moon was unbearable bright. I walked along the decking of this building looking down at everybody. Smiling at Rayne I waved and called his name. Rayne's head jerked up, "Skyler." He said urgently.

He ran towards me leaping into the air his wings began to beat as he glided towards me. Out the corner of my eye I noticed something fast heading towards Rayne. There was a flash of metal and in seconds a man had leapt off the railing into the air with a sword pointed at Rayne's heart. In those short second I didn't think I just moved. My whole body seemed to move quickly and effortless across the great distance. I couldn't let Rayne die, I needed him. Running to the wooden rail I jumped and collided with the stranger mid air. The impact was so powerful we both hurtled into the ground. Mud and pebbles went flying as we skidded across the ground.

Rayne's attacker looked stunned as we ground to a halt. This soon turned into anger. The man threw me off then stood up and took a fistful of my hair and

pulled me to my knees. As Rayne came dashing towards us the man took his blade and swung at my neck. I closed my eyes tightly. Decapitation was not a fun way to go. I waited and opened my eyes when the man yelled, "The wretched blade isn't working right!"

The blade passed through me like air. How was this possible? Matthias was as stunned as I am. Shakily he pulled the blade away from me.

"Why?" He muttered to me.

Loki who had been lingering silently in the background suddenly piped up, "You people are so stupid. The blade did not pass through her because you both share the same blood. Brother and sister."

"I don't have a brother..." I said. Then somewhere in the darkness of my mind recalled a hazy dream. There was a pregnant woman who said her son would bring about the end of man. She also said that I was twin... well I think she did. Everything was so patchy. But even so it was just a dumb dream.

Matthias threw his sword down. His eyes had glazed over and seemed almost black. A humourless smile

fell across his, "It figures," he said almost bitterly. "All this time couldn't get my head around the idea of my father abandoning his only child when in reality he had another child. It's all your fault Skyler. This mess is all your fault."

He stepped towards but Rayne pushed him away shielding me with his body. Matthias scrambled towards his blade but Rayne quickly picked it up and tossed it to Loki. "I'm done with this shit," Rayne told Matthias flatly, "I would kill you but Skyler would probably get upset."

"I'd like to see you try." Matthias replied as Rayne walked towards me.

Rayne lost his cool and swung round knocking Matthias out cold. Angrily I ran over to my estranged brother and shielded him before Rayne could land another blow.

"Don't you dare hurt my brother." I yelled at him. Rayne looked hurt and confused and replied, "He wanted to hurt you."

"Probably because he was hurting too. Sometimes people say awful words in the heat of the moment because they are so upset. We do not know his story so we shouldn't judge him." I told Rayne.

"Why do you have to be so God damn sanctimonious-can't we just kill him!" Rayne said angrily.

"No. We are going to take him to our place and welcome him into our home. He is the only family I have left now that Grandma has gone." I said feeling teary.

"Grandma's gone?" Rayne said stunned.

I nodded, if I had said anything I would have started to cry and I wanted to grieve in private. Rayne somehow read my mind and simply said, "If that is what you wish."

Suddenly Bea rushed over to me, "You're not a vampire, are you."

I remembered my Grandma's voice.

"No. I'm not." I replied.

Bea sniffed me, "No, but you have changed."

She was right, I felt different. Grandma said I wouldn't become a vampire but I might pick up a few traits. I felt faster and my senses felt keener.

Stephanie suddenly appeared at my side. "Are you okay?"

At first I was really happy to see her, but this soon was replaced by a nagging worry, "Stephanie, why did you risk yourself? You must be more careful." I said worriedly.

"I'm an immortal- it's not like I die easily." She shrugged.

"How did you find out?" I asked.

"Rudolph." she replied blushing deeply.

"Stephanie the man-"

"Is a pervert I know." She said.

"Stay away from him and him as well." I pointed at Aidan who appeared out the bushes.

"I'll try." Stephanie said edging away towards Loki.

Aidan smiled, "Well know that Skyler is safe, I'll drive her home."

"Over my dead body." I replied.

Loki smoothly came between us, "I'll take her home."

"I don't trust either of you." I said suspiciously.

Bea appeared waving a cell phone, "Kai is coming to pick us up."

Both Aidan and Loki looked disappointed. Glancing at Stephanie she looked disappointed too. So Aidan said his farewell and him and his pack disappeared into the forest leaving Loki to pester Stephanie until Kai came.

Chapter 41

dark black magic: chapter 33: broken morning

Matthias POV

My head was thumping but I lay in soft bed that smelt of delicate flowers and earth. My eyes opened and a fuzzy outline of someone lay in front of me.

"Dalton?" I asked wearily.

"I wish." A disgruntled voice replied. Rayne was lying next to me topless. My mouth fell open in horror.

"What the hell!" I yelled jumping out of bed so fast I got tangled in the sheets and fell face flat on the floor. A pair of woman's shoes and dress lay over a chair opposite the bed. Rayne got out of bed and picked up

the dress, "I picked this this out for you to wear." He said sarcastically.

"Where am I?" I demanded.

"This is my apartment. It has one bedroom so Skyler slept on the couch last night giving the guest of honour a nice comfy bed." Rayne said almost bitterly.

"She did that after what I said last night?" I said in disbelief.

"My feelings exactly."

"Where is she now?"

"On the couch probably grieving the loss of her- I mean your Grandmother."

I never met my grandmother, I didn't even know I had one. Skyler must have been raised by her.

"What happened to her?" I asked.

Rayne took a deep breathe and said grimly, "She was murdered. Skyler is distraught she thinks it's all her fault."

I didn't reply, I couldn't even imagine the pain she was going through. Rayne looked pained and worried for Skyler turning to me he said, "She needs you Matthias, you are her only family now."

I wanted to believe him but Rayne was a demon. He had seduced my sister and led her astray.

"I will protect her from now on." I replied.

"We will protect her." Rayne interjected.

"Skyler does need your kind."

"My kind? I'm sorry did you forget you almost turned her in to a vampire yesterday?"

"That was an accident."

"That was the result of your own stupidity. You are too proud to acknowledge what you really are so you starve yourself of blood then end up loosing control. I'm not the dangerous one. I know who I am."

The words cut me. I didn't know what to say. It was true I hated being a vampire and the act of drinking blood was so degrading I starved myself regularly.

Rayne walked to the other side of the room, "I will get you some blood and you must drink it, if not for your sake then for Skyler's. The sun is not up yet so I would go back to sleep." He said.

Grudgingly I nodded and returned to my bed.

Stephanie POV

Kai dropped me off at my house and I climbed the guttering and sneaked back into my bedroom. The next morning I was awoken by pebbles being thrown against my window. Sleepily I stumbled over to the window and looked out. Aidan was stood by a motorcycle with a bunch of wild flowers. How corny. Opening the window I leaned out, "Hey Aidan." I said.

"Hi. I was wondering if you wanted to spend the day with me?" Aidan asked grinning like a puppy dog. A voice whispered behind me, "You're not feeling well today."

I turned and saw Loki standing behind me smiling suavely in jeans and a tight white t-shirt. He looked like a movie star and I couldn't help but smile back.

He was so beautiful. Tearing my gaze away I looked down at Aidan who was anxiously waiting for my answer.

"Um, I'm not feeling to great today. Could we do something tomorrow?" I asked.

Aidan face turned into a worried expression, "If you are ill then you must see a doctor."

"I think it's just a 24 hour bug or something. I'll be fine by tomorrow."

"Okay. Stay in bed and get some rest. I'll call again tomorrow." Aidan said mounting his bike.

Smiling I waved, "Bye."

Loki peered out the window as he drove away muttering, "Loser."

"Why did you come here?" I asked.

Loki folded his arms across his chest and leaned into the wall, "Skyler originally but she is a lost cause."

"Rayne and her are pretty solid." I replied walking back over to my bed. I could feel Loki's eyes following me.

"I'm not going to labour over a lost cause." he said.

"Well, apparently I'm destined to be with Aidan so you're wasting your time here."

"I don't think so. Something tells me you want to have a little fun before committing yourself entirely to that mutt." Loki sauntered forward running his fingers through his glossy hair. My heart was beating faster. He was so much more prettier than Rudolph.

"Do feel the pull between us?" I asked stroking my hair. Mesmerized I nodded. There was something dangerous and sexy about Loki that made me breathless. Loki pressed his body against mine and kissed me. Melting into his arms a small voice in the back of my head whispered- slut. Shocked by my behaviour I pushed Loki away.

I had already slept with one guy and now I was thinking about sleeping with another. Loki looked stunned and confused. Shit- how was I suppose to explain to him that I didn't want to sleep with him because I had already had a one night stand with another man several hours ago.

"Am I going to fast?" Loki asked politely.

I shook my head, "No, it's not what you think. There is part of me that wants you so bad. But there is another part that doesn't want to be the town slut."

Loki shrugged, "Well what do you want to do?"

I honestly didn't know. Sleeping with two guys didn't make me a slut but perhaps sleeping with them in quick succession did? Should I act like a lady or have fun. What about Aidan. He was cute but I didn't feel any strong attachment or great attraction between us- at least not like Loki. Chewing the my lip I juggle the idea in my head.

"If you take me out to dinner I will not feel such a push over." I said.

Loki shrugged, "Where would you like to go?"

"I love pizza but I guess it is too early in the morning."

"Not in Rome." Loki said taking my hand.

My bedroom melted away into an alley way. The sun was shining and I could see a plaza beyond the alley

with thousands of chairs and tables. I was no longer dressed in my pyjamas, I was in white sundress.

"Are we in Rome?" I asked.

Loki nodded and led me out into the sunshine, "We are going to have dinner with an old friend- an immortal like yourself."

"How old is this guy?" I asked.

"Six hundred give or take a few years. He lives in Venice, but we will lunch here and join him in the evening."

"Sounds amazing." I replied.

Skyler POV

Grandma once told me as one cycle ends another one starts. The police contacted me just after we arrived back home. Grandma had been mauled to death by an animal. She was to be burried in Wales and Rayne was going to use his unique powers to take me to her funeral later in the week. This was my own doing, I had dropped the wolf strap and that woman had picked it up and used it against me. Rayne and I

swore that we would find the strap and destroy it. I couldn't let any more innocent people die because of me. Rayne insisted it was not my fault but I couldn't help but feel responsible. Lying on the couch I stared up at the ceiling tears rolling down my face. There was a gentle knock on the lounge door and Rayne peered through.

"Are you still crying?" He asked.

I shook my head, but my red eyes gave the truth away. I loved my Grandma so much and I didn't even get to say goodbye properly.

"I miss her so much." I said.

Rayne sat down on the floor next to me and rested his forehead against mine, "Tell me what to do to make you happy again? I don't know how to help you and it is killing me." He said.

I kissed his forehead and replied, "There is nothing you can do for me. I need to grieve."

"Then I'll stay right here by your side." He said.

Chapter 42

dark black magic: chapter 33: tangled web

Stephanie POV

I stood in front of a giant gold mirror twirling about in an overpriced Italinan boutique dress. Loki sat slumped on a chair with a bottle of champagne watching me spin. The store assistant grinned as Loki said in Italian, "We'll buy that."

Slipping into the dressing room I took off the dress and put another dress on that he had picked. I stepped out and Loki said, "We're getting that one as well."

This was so much fun. Loki had already taken me to a real pizzeria to get dinner and now we were

shopping. For the first time in a long while I was having fun. Loki stood up and twirled me around, "Your hair is growing back quickly." he commented. My hair had fallen out because I was being bullied so badly but then I turned into an immortal and suddenly my whole body has woken up. In the last few days my hair has grown a couple of inches. My mother can't believe it. Although I'm worried she might try and send me back to school again. Turning to Loki I said, "Yeah it's growing back really quick."

"Why did it fall out." He asked.

Taking a sip of champagne I told him the truth, "I was bullied by these bitches. I couldn't escape, I had no one to turn. My life was so hopeless." I replied.

"Mortality is not an issue for you anymore. In a couple of decades those girls will be toothless hags." Loki said.

I burst out laughing. I never really thought of it like that. All those girls will grow old and loose their beauty while my lovliness will stay will me forever. Sitting on Loki's lap I teasingly bit his lip.

"You're so funny." I smiled.

Loki peered past me at the shop assistant and spoke something in Italian. Nuzzling his neck I asked, "What did you just say?"

"I asked her to call a cab."

"Are we doing more shopping?"

"No we are going to a hotel."

"Great." I smiled and kissed him until the shop assistant interrupted us. Our cab had come. Loki paid for my dresses and we went to the nearest hotel. Loki got the penthouse suite that looked over Rome. The whole thing was magical. The bed was enormous. Loki picked me up and placed me down on the bed. My fingers were tangled in his hair and everything seemed to melt around us. I couldn't believe this was happening for a second time and so soon. Looking up at the ceiling I kept thinking to myself, I shouldn't be doing this. What about Aidan? I only met the man last night- but then I only met Loki last night. Ignoring the little nagging voices in my head I focused on the chemistry between Loki and me. He

was deliciously intoxicating. After our love making I lay in bed feeling dazed. Loki was wandering about in a black suit.

"I hate to hurry you but we are going to be late for dinner." He said.

Groaning I rolled off the bed and headed for the shower. Loki had choosen what I was going to wear. Laid out on the chair was a beautiful dress and matching shoes. After I cleaned up I slipped on the dress and shoes. Loki smiled approvingly as I came out of the bathroom. Taking his hand the room melted away into a large marble foyer of a palace. Amazed I glanced around at the rich tapestries and large oil paintings.

"This is amazing." I whispered.

An accented male voice from behind me said, "Welcome to my home."

Loki smiled, "Hey, Jack. Long time no see, I've brought you a friend to meet." he said pushing me forward.

The stranger stepped forward, he looked no older than thirty and had beautiful dark hair and dark eyes. He took my hand and kissed it.

"Pleasure to make your acquaintance. My name is Giacomo Valente."

Afer dinner Giacomo took me aside to show me his private collection. He took me too a long corridor full of display cabinets packed with items from different centuries.

"You must have seen so many fantastic eras in history." I said looking at the vast cabinets full of priceless artefacts. Giacomo did not speak, his reflection in the cabinet glass was a quiet sort of sadness like he didn't want to contradict me.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"Nothing," he waved with a dismissive hand.

"Seriously what's wrong? You seem so sad."

Giacomo sighed, "All these beautiful items become trivial after a while. I would trade them all to spend one day with my family or my wife."

"You had a wife?"

"We all do Stephanie. We all have soul mates. Our time with them is brief then we spend centuries alone cooped up with nothing but gilded paintings and silly relics to remind us each day that once upon a time we really did belong somewhere. I'd trade all these trinkets for one day with Eleanor."

The thought never occurred to me that one day I would outlive all my friends and family. One day all that I am now would be a figment of history forgotten in time. Suddenly this life of luxury seemed an imprisonment.

"I never even thought about it- my mom and my dad." I rambled.

Giacomo shook his head, "I am sorry to burden you with such thoughts. That was unforgivable of me."

"I would have realised this sooner or later."

"Do you have someone you love?"

"Kinda of. A werewolf, but I only met him yesterday, apparently I am his mate."

"You should be with him. Spend every day with him because those are the memories that will be your companion for the rest of your life."

I nodded my head in agreement. Giacomo stared at hesitantly then said, "Stephanie, if I may be so bold I have proposal to make. In decades to come when you find yourself alone after friends, family and lovers have passed, please come to me and let us make a home together." He said.

"So you want me to live with you when everyone I know dies."

"Yes, it is a lonely life and to know there is another immortal like myself is ever so comforting."

I thought about it then agreed. Giacomo smiled and for the umpteenth time kissed my hand. "Thank you." he whispered.

Loki barged in, "Time's moving on Jack! Stephanie and I got to fly!" Loki said abruptly.

Giacomo smiled and nodded, "Take care Stephanie and remember your promise." he said.

The room melted away into my little bedroom. The floor was filled with hundreds of bags of clothes and shoes. Loki looked at his watch, "I've gotta fly Steph! Been a pleasure. Have fun with Aidan and remember if you need me just shout." He said disappearing into thin air.

Rayne POV

There was nothing I could do but hold her hand while her world fell apart. I loved her so much it killed me to see her so sad. Sat on the couch I held her as she cried softly into my chest.

"I swear I will hunt down the person responsible for this." I vowed to Skyler.

"This is my fault. I did this." She said.

Stroking her hair I replied, "This is not your fault. Don't say such stupid things."

"I lost the wolf strap."

"Saving Stephanie. Then some psycho bitch stole it and used it to murder your Grandmother. Skyler you did not kill her. That evil bitch in your dream did."

Skyler fell silent overwhelmed by emotion and sadness. Her desolation beat into me.

Days and weeks past. Nothing happened of any significance. We attended Grandma's funeral. We came back. Skyler went to work, Matthias and Dalton got a job. Stephanie and Aidan grew closer and so did Matthias and Skyler. Loki disappeared as did Rudolph. Our lives were quieting down or so I thought...

Chapter 43

dark black magic: chapter 34: bad nights

Skyler POV

The forest was beautifully calm today. Rayne held my hand as we walked through the wet grass.

"I want to surprise you." Rayne said as we followed a forest track. He turned off the path and led me through the forest to a pretty lake.

"This is beautiful!" I replied.

Rayne smiled, "I've always wanted to take you out on a proper date." He then pointed to a boat on the bank. Climbing in he pushed the boat into the water and began to row. Everything about this picture was

perfect until, I noticed on the shore of lake someone was standing and waving in panicked motion at me.

I leaned forward and realised that this person was Rayne. But Rayne was rowing. How could there be two Raynes?

"Confused?" The Rayne in the boat asked. His skin burst open spouting black feathers. Screaming I scrambled to the other side of the boat. Out of Rayne's skin a monster unfurled with four clawed legs and lethal beak filled with sharp teeth. Prowling towards me it spoke,

"I'm coming to get you and no one can stop me."

I sat bolt upright in bed panting. Stupid dream, why did I keep having these dreams? I didn't want to sleep anymore. I rolled over and saw Rayne was laid sound asleep next to me. His black hair flecked across his closed eyes. Tthat hair was the same color as those feathers.

Lightly I traced the outline of Rayne's lips with my fingertips- was Rayne the monster? Everyone had warned me that Rayne was a monster. Since

Grandma's death I've been keeping a lot of my feelings hidden from Rayne. He keeps disappearing and reappearing all the time. Loki too makes a lot of flying visits. They say all of this is because of the wolf strap but I overheard them talking about a girl called Sophie. I think Rayne is hiding things from me and suddenly I finding myself scared of him. At the moment I'm pretending everything is okay for the sake of my friends and my brother. Matthias does not trust Rayne, he tells me that demons are incapable of love but I always defend Rayne despite my doubts. When we first got together everything was great but now I feel like we are drifting apart. What do we really have in common? Even if Rayne is telling the truth I'm beginning to feel like I would be better off without him. Is this bad? Would I miss him that much?

I got up for brekfast and found Dalton and Matthias in the kitchen squabbling amongst themselves. Dalton didn't sleep so he spent most of his days sat in the lounge watching cable. He was affectionately known as the resident squatter. Matthias worked the evenings and slept during the day but he had been

given the week off because the bar had some refurbishing work that needed to be done. So as I walked into the kitchen Dalton was shoving the remote control down his pants, "We are not watching death truckers!" He yelled at Matthias.

"I'm not going to watch some human soap opera either!"

"I've looking forward to Sandy Beach Bay omnibus all week!"

"Dude I'm not putting my hand down your pants so you better give me the remote control."

"Never!"

The two began to wrestle but Dalton with the remote control down his pants looked more like a crab trying to fight back. Walking like John Wayne he scuttled out the kitchen with Matthias not far behind. Neither of them even said good morning.

Loki materialized into the kitchen, "What's cooking?" he said opening the fridge and helping himself to a slice of stale pizza.

"Nothing." I shrugged.

"Where's Prince Charming?"

"In bed."

Dalton burst through the kitchen door clinging on to the belt of his jeans, while dragging Matthias who was holding on to his jean leg.

"How old are you two?" I snapped.

"Dalton put the remote control in his pants!" Matthias protested.

Loki smiled, "Dalton take the object out of your pants or I will have great pleasure at removing it myself."

Dalton smiled and joked, "I love it when you talk dirty."

"You better bleach that remote when it comes out your nasty pants." I snapped.

Dalton frowned, "My pants are clean."

"Lord knows I washed them." I replied grimly.

Loki headed towards our bedroom mentioning he wanted to see Rayne. Within a few seconds Rayne

was up and dressed. Kissing me on the cheek he said, "I need to go.." and with that him and Loki disappeared.

What could I do?

Heating up some stale piece of pizza I folded it up into a napkin and headed out the door, Matthias craned his head through the door yelling, "Where you going?"

"Work." I replied.

"But it's your day off."

"I know." I said slamming the door.

Greg was just as surprised when I turned up.

"What are you doing here." He asked.

"I'm feeling down and wanted to share the misery." I sighed.

Greg took my hand his eyes hopeful, "Skyler if you need anything just say the word."

"Do you think you could listen to all my woes for a few minutes?"

"You know I would."

"Well, things between me and Rayne aren't working out. He keeps sneaking off to see this Sophie girl I've never heard of."

"Do you think he's having an affair?"

"No I don't think so- he always takes Loki, and Rayne can't stand Loki. I doubt they are having a menage a trois."

"Have you asked him?"

"He just brushes it off like water off a duck's back. We used to be so intense and now it's just seems to have died. There's no magic."

"Perhaps it's time to let him go."

"I don't want to dump him."

"Then take a break. Ask him to move on out so you can get your thoughts together or you could move out."

"Hey, Kai's band is playing at the local bar tonight, why don't you tag along? Stephanie and Aidan are going to be there too we'll have a great time!"

I thought about it for a moment and then thought Hell why not?

"Sure, can you give me a ride?"

"No problem, but just between you and me- Kai's band sucks. The only reason he gets asked to come back is because every female and male in this town wants to get in his pants."

"Kai is very pretty."

Bea appeared with a crate of sage smudge sticks, "Gentleman down front wants all these sticks."

"What for?"

"An exorcism."

"What the heck is exorcising with all these sticks."

"I don't know, but he's not one of us. He looks like a priest."

"Ah shoot. Is he the crazy that came in here trying to smash up our stock in the name of Jesus?"

"No, he's young and cute."

At the mention of cute Stephanie appeared out the back. She spent a lot time down here with Greg and co. Despite pledging her undying faithfulness to Aidan, Stephanie had this promiscuous streak in her she couldn't help but devour men. Smiling she took the crate of smudge sticks from Bea and headed to the front of the shop. Bea ran after her, "Stephanie Collins have you no shame at all? That is a man of God!"

Greg rolled his eyes, "Oh crap, Aidan is going to kill me if he ever finds out that Stephanie is running about behind his back."

"I don't understand I thought they were suppose to be soul mates?"

"They are but Stephanie is very young and is at the mercy of all sorts of teenage impulses that she hasn't learnt to control."

"I feel sorry for Aidan even if he is a bit of bastard."

"Yep, poor sod."

We watched Stephanie weave her magic on the priest. He offered to buy her a coffee and the next thing you know she had left.

Stephanie POV

A church off all the place to do it a church. "You've out done yourself Stephanie." I mumbled to my self. My priest was laid on the chuch pew with nothing but rosary beads hung round his neck. Poor guy. Sucking his shoulder I whispered, "You were magnificent."

He blushed, poor lamb was speechless. Sitting on top of him I was ready for round two but my cell phone bleeped.

"Shit." I murmured getting off of him and searching through the pile of clothes for my phone.

"Who is it?" Mr. Priest asked- I never asked their names, it was easier to forget them that way. Flipping up the phone screen I read a text message from Aidan.

"It's from my boyfriend." I said causally reading the message. Mr. Priest sat up in alarm, "You have a boyfriend."

"Oh come on, it's not like either of us were looking for anything long term," I remarked snapping the phone shut. "Lucky for you he doesn't want to meet me until this evening."

"Why's that lucky?" Mr. Priest asked.

"Because you get to have me for another couple of hours." I smiled.

Greg was cashing up by the time I returned. He gave me a filthly look, the same look he always gave me when I went off with any other guy.

"We just had a little fun." I said defensively.

"That was taking it too far. Do you have any idea how crazy those religious types get?"

"Oh come on Greg don't bust my balls. You know Aidan has these stupid 'no sex before marriage' rule. I get bored. I have needs."

"You have no self control. What if you get a disease!"

"I use protection."

"It can break."

"Oh don't be such a spoil sport." I snapped throwing my purse on the table. I knew Greg meant well but I was young I want to live a little before settling down. I wanted t be with Aidan but not right now.

Bea came wandering out, "You didn't, did you?"

I nodded.

"In a church?" Bea said horrified.

"I know. There were all these creepy statues looking at me-"

Greg covered his ears, "Too much information."

"You're such an old man Greg!" I replied.

My phone bleeped again, another text message from Aidan. He couldn't make it tonight, apparently his cousin had turned up unexpected.

"There goes my evening, guess I coming out with you guys." I smiled.

Greg shook his head, "No way, you are far too young and god knows what you would get up to if we took you too a bar."

"Fine. I'll go home and be a good girl tonight." I said grabbing my purse and saying goodnight. Heading out the door I walked out the alley on to the main street. Walking past the stores an advert in one of the store windows caught my eye. 'CHRISTMAS PROM'. Underneath were six photos of the winter prom queen candidates. My breathe caught in my throat as I read their names. I didn't need to, I already recognised them from their photos but my mind seemed to freeze and stutter. The chantings, the crass remarks, the beatings all swelled up in me and for the first time ever so did this feeling of rage. Pure hatred. Behind some one inhaled deeply.

"I know those vibes," he said, "One of the most powerful emotions." Loki was standing behind me.

"Those bitches ruined my life." I said.

"Well, it's only good manners to return the favour." Loki whispered.

"Sleep with their boyfriends?"

"If it pleases you but I have a better idea." He smiled.

Skyler POV

"Stephanie got off with the priest." I said in disbelief. Bea sipped her rum and coke and nodded, "She's out of control."

We sat in the corner of the bar waiting for Kai to get up and sing. Already a group of women had gathered around the small stage with 'I heart Kai' T-Shirts on.

Greg stared at his bottle of beer, "It's only a matter of time before that girl get's herself in trouble."

"I wish we could reach her." Bea sighed.

"She'll learn the hard way." I said watching Kai swan towards the stage with his band waving a black feather boa.

Bea groaned, "Oh god, I hope this doesn't last long."

Kai announced his first song, "This song is called The hornless worm."

All of us had that kinda of WTF expression on our faces.

"Worms don't have horns." Bea whispered.

"Kai lyrics are mystery to everyone but himself." Greg said.

A out of tune guitar strum a cord and some one began to drum an off beat tempo. Then Kai opened his mouth and auditory assault on the ears began. Kai was the worst singer I had ever heard in my life but shockingly the audience loved in. The sounds of their screams drowned out the awful music. Thank god for small mercies. Staring at Kai's black feather boa it reminded of my dream.

"Hey do you a monster that kind of of looks like a giant bird but has four legs and really big claws." I asked.

Greg looked blankly at me but Bea raised an eye brow, "You mean like a miracle chicken?"

"It's a lot bigger than a chicken."

"It's a demon, it has a few names but miracle chicken is one. I only know this because a few people have spotted one roaming the woods near the vampire city."

"What are they?"

"A demon that attaches itself to a female owner and has an intimate relationship with her."

"Sex with chicken- that is screwed up." I said disgusted.

"It has the ability to shift into man." Bea added.

A demon that attaches itself to a female, feeds off of her through intimacy and has the ability to change into a man. Rayne was bonded to me, he gains energy through intimacy and I keep dreaming of him turning into that monster...could he be one of those things? Was he just using me. Suddenly I felt numb.

"Hey, here comes your young man." Bea said pointing across the room. Rayne was walking towards me. Getting up I walked to him and grabbed his arm, and took him outside.

"Hey baby what's up." He smiled trying to put his arms around me. Pushing him away I replied, "I want to break up."

Chapter 44

dark black magic: chapter 35: deceit

Skyler POV

Rayne stared at me and mouthed, "What?"

He was smiling nervously at me like I was joking or something, but when my expression didn't lighten he seemed to fall apart. I folded my hands across my chest and said, "I'm serious Rayne. I have a whole heap of crazy going on in my life-"

Desperately he pleaded, "I know things have been hard because of your Grandma-"

"Grandma has nothing to do with this. I just need sometime apart."

"Skyler you need me more than ever. You have no idea about the type of shit that is about to kick off. I need to protect you." He said urgently.

"What stuff? I have no idea Rayne. You never tell me anything."

"Damn it, there are people after you Skyler. I refuse to walk away and leave you."

"I have Matt now-"

"A vampire can not protect you!"

"Please Rayne, I need to have a break."

"No. I refuse. You are mine."

"Then I have no choice but to order you."

"Skyler wait, please don't send me away. Just listen to me-"

"Rayne I order you to leave me alone."

Rayne bowed, "As you wish." He replied.

Then I was left alone outside the bar. Tears were falling from my eyes and I stared at the empty space where Rayne was stood.

"You sent him away?" Matt said, he must have followed me out of the bar. He stood watching the tears falling.

"You did the right thing." He said hugging me.

"Why do I feel so awful."

"Cos he's still in your mind messing up your thoughts. You don't need him Skyler. Demons can't love. They don't understand it."

"I thought sending him away would be so much more easier than this." I cried.

What had I done?

"I didn't want to tell you this but I noticed another female scent on Rayne." Matt said.

"What?"

"A female vampire, just hints of her on his clothes."

I remembered overhearing Loki and Rayne talking about a female vampire called Sophie. Oh my God, did Rayne cheat on me with a vampire? My heart was slowly cracking up. I couldn't face going back into the bar.

"Matt I want to go home." I said.

He nodded, "I'll get Dalton to take you back." He smiled.

Dalton took me home. I cried like a baby all the way back. I couldn't believe I had been so dumb. Rayne was two timing me, feeding off my energy then running to his vampire bitch. Everything had been a lie.

Stephanie POV

"God, I'm so wired." I said flicking through the pages of some magic mumbo jumbo spell book.

"Have a good a day?" Loki asked. We were sat in Greg's store browsing the forbidden section. What's the point in having a forbidden section full of books you can't sell in a store? Weird. Answering Loki's question I replied.

"A priest to be exact."

"Oh bravo." Loki said.

"Greg and the others think it's disgusting and shameless."

"It is. But being a demon I have different perception on debauchery."

"Shit. I'm going to hell for that aren't I?"

"Probably."

"Good thing I can't die!"

"Did you just remember that?"

"Sometimes Loki you can be a condescending weener. Anyways what the hell are we looking at these dusty old books?"

"This, my dear, is destruction magic and destruction magic can only be summoned by people with strong intense emotions. Like your feelings towards those girls that hurt you.."

I flicked through a page of another book. Most of the spells were really extreme- disfigurement, disease, curses, infertility, burning ect.

"I don't want to do anything to extreme." I said to Loki.

"Stephanie don't you remember what these people did to you? They beat you up and mentally tortured you. Don't you want revenge."

"Yeah but I much preferred my idea of sleeping with their boyfriends then disembowelling them."

"You could annihilate your whole school with the hate you were feeling earlier."

"That would make me feel a million times worse!"

"But imagine how it would feel finally executing your own justice. Showing them how it feels to be helpless and sad."

"I'm not doing it."

Loki threw his hands into the air, "I give up. I can see I'm wasting my time. But if you ever change your mind remember to call me."

He disappeared again leaving me in the store to tidy the books away. Lucky for me Greg gave me a key so I could come and go as I pleased. Tidying the books away I heard the roar of motorcycle. Great Aidan

was here. Shoving the books out of sight I opened the door for him, "Hey honey." I smiled.

Aidan beamed back at me, "I was hoping to catch you."

Kissing me lightly on the lips he took my hand and led me over to motorbike, "Look what I got you." He said, pulling out a ring box.

Shit. This was too soon. Aidan got down on one knee.

"Marry me."

Rayne POV

I sat in the forest, miles away from Skyler, my heart bleeding inwardly. Why did she reject? How could she forget me so easily? I punched a tree trunk splintering it into a thousand pieces. Without her I didn't want heal. I watched the blood drip down my hands on to the floor weakening me. I needed her, she may not need me but Skyler is everything to me. Without her I have no purpose. I'm better off diminishing into non-existence. I hit another tree with my good arm, the pain distracted me momentarily from the overwhelming despair I was

sinking into. Without her I was dangerous. I could end up hurting her and loosing her forever. Spreading my wings I flew high up and let myself free fall to the ground. I was so weak. Closing my eyes I listened out for her command.

"Ask me to come back." I whispered numbly.

Loki POV

Stephanie had been ozzing rage this evening. She was positively glowing. That girl is quite a character, I reckon she has a touch of siren in her- all that good looks couldn't have come purely from apes. Such seduction skills, she would make a fabulous demon. Poor Aidan wouldn't know how to handle her. Stupid mutt. Werewolves are definatly on the lower end of the supernatural- they still live in the forests for goodness sake! I had wanted to see Stephanie slaughter those girls in some glorious and bloody way but her human morals were holding her back. Either that or she wasn't pissed off enough. I wanted to wind that girl up and watch her go.

Shimmering into Skyler's bedroom expecting to see Rayne still fast asleep I was surprised to see Skyler still there.

"Where's Rayne?" I asked.

Skyler shrugged her shoulders. The sadness she was radiating was intoxicating. Soaking it in I asked, "What happened?"

"I sent him away."

"Why?"

"Who's Sophie?" she asked curiously.

Ah, she had sent him away. She suspected him of cheating, how delightful. I couldn't resist, "Surely you know who Sophie is?"

"No, tell me."

"Rayne's mistress."

"What?"

"I thought he told you. He got lonely while you were at work so he- I can't believe he lied to you. He told me that you knew about her."

"No I didn't!" she sobbed.

"I'm so sorry." I lied.

She clutched her pillow crying her eyes out. Bowing I excused myself and left the room. This was too good to be true. If I separate Rayne and Skyler I could have Skyler! My very own demigod. I quickly located Rayne and found him on a bloody heap in the middle of the forest.

"What happened?" I asked.

"Skyler left me. You have to help me Loki."

"I've already been over to Skyler's. I shimmered in to your bedroom thinking you would be there but Skyler was on top of that troll fellow Greg."

Rayne didn't respond. It was pathetic to see and ancient demon act like an adolescent. Tears fell down his face.

"I can't live without her." he said.

"Give me a day and I'll see what I can do." I smiled shimmering off.

Stephanie POV

I couldn't say no, could I.

Sat up in my bedroom I stared at the ring- it was still in it's box. My parents would freak out if I told them I was getting married to Aidan. As far as the folks are concerned round here Aidan and his werewolves are nothing more than squatters and gypsies that live in the forest. Shoving the ring under my mattress, I got washed and dressed. Now that I'm engaged I will start my life of celibacy. No more men. I rummaged through my dresser drawers and found a purity ring my insane Grandma once gave me. Putting it on my finger I vowed never to sleep with another man as long as Aidan was alive.

The low rumble of Aidan's motorcycle came up the road. Aidan was so excited. I was a little excited about getting married but I was also very nervous. Nerves make me sick and I had butterflies in my stomach all morning. Mom and Brad had gone to work so I let Aidan in.

"Do you want some breakfast?" I asked.

"You're such angel. Why don't you sit down for a change and I'll make you something." He said making

me sit down while he started cooking all sorts of things.

"I want a big wedding." Aidan said.

"I just want something small."

"But I have a lot of family."

"A big wedding it is then."

"Great! We can have it out in the forest under the moonlight."

"I want a church service and hotel reception."

"We can compromise." Aidan smiled handing me a plate of fried up food. The smell of the food hit me sending waves of nausea pounding through me. Running to the toilet I threw up. How weird? I didn't feel ill this morning. I usually get stomach sickness in the morning but not like this. Aidan was pale with concern, "I'll book a doctor's appointment." He said.

"It's just a tummy bug don't fuss." I replied.

But an hour later I was sat in the doctor's surgery with my head in a bucket. Aidan had to call a cab because there was no way I could wear a motorcycle

helmet and throw up at the same time. Sat in the sugery the receptionist called my name. Aidan waited patiently in the waiting area. My doctor was shocked to see me looking so well, last time he ad seen me I was a quivering wreck.

"Your hair has grown back and you have out on weight. How remarkable." He said. We talked and he asked me to pee in tube- yuck. He went off and ran the tests and came back, "I think I know what is causing your sickness." he said.

"What?" I asked.

"It appears that you are pregnant."

Chapter 45

dark black magic: chapter 36: kidnapped

Loki POV

God sees all.

Nothing eludes him- well at least in the eyes our God fearing religious bigots who I so desperately needed to dispose of Rayne. Men and women trained in the ancient art of exorcism were able to kill the physical manifestation of a demon. My dearest wish would be to exorcise Rayne myself but I lacked the ability to do so. Thus why I was in the need for some sort of religious figure who I could black mail into doing my dirty work. Thankfully my little seductress, Stephanie, has already done the hard work for me.

She had offered the forbidden fruits of the flesh to this young naive priest and he had taken it whole heartedly, breaking his vow of celibacy. Standing outside the church I could hear the tuneless groan of the congregation to a depressing organ melody. Slipping through the doors I stood at the back of the church and watched the young priest deliver a sermon on purity. What a hypocrite. I listened to his monologue until I fell asleep from boredom. When the sermon finished and the church cleared away I approached him.

"What can I do for you my child?" The priest asked.

"I have a message from God." I said bluntly.

"Go on my child."

"He said and I quote, 'I saw you banging that chick in my house.'- perhaps that wasn't his exact words but you get the vibe."

"I don't know what you are talking about." The priest said, his pale expression revealing the truth.

"Two times in pew six- God sees all Father."

The priest pursed his lips, "If it's money you want-"

"I'm obscenely wealthy."

"What do you want?"

"You."

"Me?" He replied confused.

I shimmered to where Rayne was and hauled him over my shoulder then shimmered back into the church dumping Rayne's weak body on the pew. His black wings folded black all mangled and bloodied. The priest jumped back crossing himself, "Why have you brought this unholy creature into my house?" he demands.

"This demon that wants to die and you will be the one doing the honors." I said.

Rayne looked up in pathetic weakened state and said, "I want to die."

"Soon my comrade." I replied softly.

"I do not know how to kill a demon." The priest confess.

"An exocism should do it."

"But I do not know how."

"Then find someone who does. You have contacts."

The priest nodded, "Fine, but you can not leave him here. There is a basement where we can conceal him."

"Very well." I sighed hoisting Rayne over my shoulder once more and dumping him in the basement.

Before I left Rayne grabbed my ankle, "Thank you." he said quietly.

"I hope you find peace." I lied shaking him off. My ears started burning,

Stephanie was calling me.

I shimmered into Stephanie's bedroom. She was screaming my name, sobbing uncontrollably. Oh God, I should have stayed in the damn basement with Rayne. Feigning interest I rested my hands upon her shoulder, "What's matter?" I asked.

"I'm pregnant, I'm fucking pregnant!" She cried.

"That's what happens when you fuck." I retorted.

"I thought immortals could not get pregnant."

"Who told you that?"

"Nobody, I just assumed-"

"That was dumb."

"I can you stop being a dick and help me!"

"Immortals can get pregnant but only with other supernatural beings."

"Well I slept with a few of those and you."

"Great, didn't you think about using protection."

"It's a bit too late now! Do you have any idea how much trouble I'm in? Aidan thinks I a freaking virgin."

"How sweet."

"Can you be serious! This could be your kid."

"How many weeks are you?"

"The doctor thinks I'm four months pregnant which is impossible."

"A supernatural birth is supernaturally fast."

"Ah shit. How am I going to explain this to Aidan after I showed him my purity ring. How am I going to explain this to my parents?"

"I have no idea but at the moment I have far more pressing matters. I will arrange an appointment at a special clinic. They will be able to tell you the species that grows with in you and hopefully that will jog your memory."

"What if it is yours?"

"Then I will be a responsible father."

"Really?"

I nodded, lying. If it was mine I would shove it in a sack and drown it. Children are unbearable.

Skyler POV

Loki shimmered into the kitchen holding a letter, "It's from Rayne." he said.

The writing was Rayne's and I almost died inside when I opened it and read the first line-

'I'm sorry I don't love you any more.'

I threw the letter down. Nothing in the world could hurt me more than that. The pain and sadness was intense I couldn't breathe. My whole body ached for Rayne. I couldn't bare the thought of never seeing him again. Loki pulled up a chair close to me.

"I'm so sorry. When he started seeing Stella I couldn't believe it either."

"Stella?" I said feeling my mouth run dry. Rayne was supposedly having an affair with a vampire called Sophie.

Loki's eyes widened and he broke out into a nervous smile, "I meant Sarah."

I picked up the letter and read the part I missed,

'- Serena and I are very happy together. Please forgive me.'

"You lying sack of doggie poo." I yelled at Loki. "You tricked me! What the hell have you done with my boyfriend!"

Loki face hardened, "I wanted to play the nice guy and now I have to do this."

He grabbed my arm and I screamed. Just Matthias and Dalton ran into the room Loki teleported us away. My little apartment kitchen melted away to reveal a huge stone room with a four poster bed. Loki threw me onto the bed.

"In a few short hours the bond you and Rayne share will be severed."

"What are you talking about? What have you done to Rayne!"

"You are a new soul wandering about the world without a mate. Rayne thought that your contract would be enough to seal your souls but I found a loop hole. Rayne as a church waiting to be killed. As soon as he dies your bonds will separate and once again you will be free."

"What are you going to do to me?"

"I will seal your soul to mine. You will become my Queen and carry my children and we shall rule over earth."

"Are you crazy? I will never be yours."

"I don't need your consent. I will just make you."

"Rayne will never allow it."

"Pity he's dying and as soon as he does we are getting married."

"Go to Hell!"

"Soon my dear, but first we have a wedding to prepare." Loki smiled.

Matthias POV

"Holy shit. Loki's gone cuckoo?" Dalton said.

"Bastard kidnapped my sister." I said grabbing my sword.

"Let's go get him!" Dalton cheered.

"I don't know where he has taken her."

"I bet Rayne would know."

"We don't know where Rayne is either." I pointed out.

Closing my eyes I bit my tongue. I didn't want to but I was going to have to ask for help from the idiots next

door. Picking up the phone I called Greg and within moment the three morons were over. Kai had brought a black mirror to scry in and Bea had brought some protective amulets and charms.

"There is no way we can face a demon as powerful as Loki. We need Rayne." Greg said as Kai stared into the mirror.

"I see a basement and I see crosses lots of them covered in dust. It looks like a church." Kai said.

"There are half dozen churches around here. If we split up we'll take less time." I said.

Greg paired with Kai and I paired with Dalton leaving Bea by herself.

"As soon as you find him call us and we will bust him free." I said.

Chapter 46

dark black magic: chapter 37: love shatters

Rayne POV

I never understood the pain of mortal men as they killed themselves for the ones they have loved or lost. Whenever I witnessed love it always brought about a childish wonderment. Demons cannot feel love, but they do observe its power and effect.

I remember the moment I was bound to Skyler, suddenly everything in the world melted away and there was only her. For the first time in my life I actually cherished something, and the feelings I have for her are so strong. When she loved me- if she ever loved me- I felt I could move mountains and take on

Hell's army. But when she took her love away I was left with this crippling hollow void inside that penetrates every fragment of my existence. How can I forget love after centuries of being alone- I'd rather die. The worst torture in Hell could not compare to a fraction of the loneliness and pain that I would have to endure without her. This is why I will become obsolete. I will disappear into non-existence and she will forget about me. I couldn't stop myself imagining her entwined in Greg's arms, smiling and laughing with him. Giving him her soul, her kisses, her body.

The priest entered the basement with an exorcist.

"Please hurry and end my misery." I said quietly to the exocist.

"Wait, stop." A voice squeaked.

Bea ran into the room like Tinkerbell on a mission. She ran to my side,

"Rayne you got to get up. Skyler needs you."

"She sent me away. I know about her and Greg."

"Loki tricked you. He's kidnapped Skyler and taken her away."

Suddenly I felt heart strengthen. A glimmer of hope flickered across my face.

"Tricked?"

"He told Skyler that you were having an affair with a vampire called Sophie."

I couldn't believe my ears, I had been a complete fool. Loki wanted Skyler's soul so badly he would resort to cheap tricks? Getting up I healed myself fully. Turning to the exocist I said cordially,

"I won't be needing your services," then I turned to the young priest, "I have to small matter to discuss with you."

Grabbing him by the throat I lifted him off his feet,

"The girl you slept with, Stephanie, is under my protection. Touch her again and I will kill you."

I dropped him to the floor and turned to Bea,

"Let's go and rescue Skyler."

"What about the others?"

"We don't need them." I said grabbing Bea and shimmering into Loki's palace.

Skyler POV

Loki appeared in my bedroom again with a beautiful white wedding gown. Throwing it at me he ordered me to put it on. I threw it back at him.

"I will never wear that." I said.

"If you do not put that on now I will go and find your little friend Stephanie and rip her heart out."

"I don't believe you. I know you slept with her."

"Skyler I have no human ethical hang ups. Morals are a concept I do not understand."

"I still don't believe you."

"Fine." He snapped disappearing then reappearing with Stephanie.

He held her against the wall, his hand hovered over her heart. Stephanie was screaming.

"Stop!!" I yelled picking up the dress.

Loki dropped Stephanie to the ground.

"Good girl. Stephanie can be your maid of honour."

"What the hell, Loki!" Stephanie snapped.

"We are having a wedding and you have just become a bridesmaid." Loki smiled.

"Have you lost your mind? I might be having your baby?" She cried.

My jaw hit the floor. Stephanie was pregnant? Loki shrugged,

"If you behave yourself I will make you the royal concubine."

Stephanie angrily spat on Loki's face. His expression darkened. Grabbing Stephanie I shielded her,

"Don't you dare touch her." I warned.

Loki laughed at my threat. He swaggered forward,

"Nobody spits on me. I will eat her heart for that."

Suddenly the bedroom door burst into a thousand pieces and Bea ran in. Loki almost burst into hysterics.

"They sent a fucking fairy after me?"

"Don't underestimate me!" she snapped at him.

"Human heart for dinner and fairy wings for dessert."

Bea lunged at him flinging what looked like glitter into his face. Loki staggered back rubbing his eyes.

"What was that stuff?" Stephanie asked.

"Kai's body glitter. Follow me." Bea said.

We ran out the bedroom into the hallway, Loki came running after us. He was much quicker and stronger. He didn't even need to run with his teleporting skills but for some reason he humoured us. Bea darted around a corner and chanted a few words. Circles of toadstools sprouted up from the ground.

"What are those?" I asked.

"Fairy rings." Bea replied.

Glancing over my shoulder I saw Loki step in a fairy ring. It seemed to slow him down a little. Angirly he cursed, "Screw this!" He shimmered into

nothingness. As he reappeared in front of us so did someone else. My heart gave a heavy thud.

"Rayne." I whispered.

Rayne stood in front of us staring a Loki who had gone pale.

"Rayne, wait." Loki stammered.

But Rayne didn't, he produced Matthias's sword swung it at Loki's neck. I placed my hands over Stephanie's eyes and closed my own. There were two loud thuds as the body then the head hit the ground. Opening my eyes I let Stephanie go. Rayne stood apprehensively watching me.

"Do you still want me?" He asked.

"I never stopped wanting you." I said, my eyes filling with tears.

Rayne dropped the sword and flung his arms around me pulling me tightly against him.

"I'm sorry," I cried. "I'll never send you away again."

Rayne held me tighter, his wings folded around me. My chest felt like it was going to burst. Kissing me gently on the lips he said,

"I almost died for you tonight."

I balled my fist up and thumped his chest,

"Why would you be so stupid!"

"Because I'm in love." Rayne replied.

Chapter 47

Dark Black Magic- chapter 38- disappear

Skyler's POV

We fled Loki's castle. Rayne used all his energy up transporting all of us back to our flat. Matt and Dalton were really pissed when we got in. They were itching for a real stand up fight.

"I wanted to kick demonic ass!" Matt snapped.

"You could have taken us along!" Dalton protested.

Rayne and I were too tired for this conversation. Rayne needed energy and I needed sleep. Ignoring them we went straight to the bedroom and let Bea deal with them. Stephanie had managed to call Aidan

for a lift home. Going into our bedroom Rayne closed the door and pulled me into him, holding me tightly.

"I'm sorry I scared you." Rayne said softly brushing my cheek.

"Please don't ever leave me again- even if I order it you must ignore my orders." I said.

"I'm not going away again." He said tilting my chin up towards him catching my gaze with his beautiful gray eyes. I felt his hands gently slide down my back to the zipper of my dress. Leaning into me he kissed me so tenderly the intensity of the moment almost hurt. The agonising longing for him was released in a single kiss. I slid my hands underneath his shirt, I needed to touch him so badly. Rayne felt it too, impatiently he threw off his shirt and grabbed me pulling me into him, every inch of his body pressing against mine. His kisses were demanding and fierce full of fiery passion. I could feel myself losing control, I wanted him so badly. Suddenly Rayne stopped and pulled away. Irratibly he yelled, "Just a minute."

Dazed I stood in front of him confused. He kissed me on the forehead, "Stay here, I'll see what Matt wants." he said.

I didn't reply. I had been so lost in the moment I hadn't noticed Matt hollering for Rayne. I also hadn't noticed I was standing half naked in my bedroom. Blushing I grabbed Rayne's shirt and threw it on. Sitting on the bed I waited for Rayne to return. When he did he rushed in and grabbed his black leather jacket, "I need to go." He said abruptly.

"Crap." I said unable to hide my disappointment.

"When I get back, I promise I'll pick up where we left off."

"What's happened?"

"Stephanie confessed everything to Aidan and he's going crazy in the town."

"How do you mean 'crazy'?"

"I don't know. Aidan is going insane and no one can find Stephanie"

"Oh my god Stephanie!" I jumped up and grabbed my shoes.

"You're staying here." Rayne said.

"What he murdered her Rayne?"

"She's an immortal they don't die easily. I'm going to find Stephanie and I'm going to kick Aidan's ass and you are going to stay here and wear my shirt."

"Rayne, what about the baby?"

Rayne looked gravely, "I don't know."

Stephanie POV

What was I going to do about Aidan?

Everyone kept telling me to keep my mouth shut without understanding the horrible gut wrenching guilt I was feeling. Bea had warned me that werewolves were known for their bad temper but Aidan always seemed so docile and puppy-like around me. I'm praying that this baby is Loki's. I can then tell Aidan how Rayne finished him off.

As Aidan pulled up in front of Skyler's apartment I ran down the steps to greet him. Like always Aidan

was happy to see me, kissing me on the lips and placing me carefully on his bike. I asked him to stop at diner for a milkshake or something. I needed to come clean- not about the pregnancy but about being with another man. I was too scared to tell the truth so I planned on telling him a little white lie.

We whirled around the corner on his bike and he drove into the dinner parking lot. The diner was was empty except for a guy sat alone in the corner. He was really gorgeous, wild black shiny hair and brown eyes that looked like warm brown honey. He glanced up at me but I quickly looked away. No more men. I told myself firmly. Aidan and I slid into a booth. Aidan being Aidan picked up a menu and ordered the biggest rare steak. I just ordered a chocolate milkshake. Taking a few deep breathes I came clean,

"Aidan, I'm going to tell you something that you are not going to like." I said.

He almost laughed at my statement as if I could possibly do no wrong. In his eyes I was this perfect

angel that was incapable of evil. His brown eyes stared at me full of love and affection,

"You could never make me angry baby." He said.

"I'm not a good girl Aidan. I tried to be for you sake but I'm not this well behaved innocent kid. I've done bad things. Really bad things and I hate myself for doing to you-"

"Because you love me so much." Aidan hinted eagerly.

"That's the problem- I don't. Aidan whatever you feel for me is not mutual. The myth about werewolves finding their mate was so romantic I really wanted to believe it. I like you but I don't love."

"You're kidding right? I know my mate, I recognised your scent in the woods. This isn't some magical shit I made up." Aidan eyes hardened and for the first time ever I saw him loose his cool.

"Maybe it is true. I don't know. But all this stuff about marriage and being together forever scares the hell out of me. I'm a teenager I want to have fun before I settle down and that's what I've been doing behind

your back. I'm sorry Aidan. I should have been clear from the start about my feelings." I said.

"You cheated on me."

"I'm sorry Aidan."

Aidan became queit and sullen. I thought he was even going to cry for one second but then he stopped and looked up at me. He grabbed my wrist. I felt his fingers crushing against my bones I screamed in pain.

"You are mine." He growled.

The pain was excruiting I couldn't reply. Helpless I tried to prize his fingers off of me.

"Let her go." A cool calm voice ordered behind me.

The man sat in the booth with those gorgeous eyes was standing next to me. I never even heard him move. The waitress was stood behind the counter threatening to call the police. Aidan was shaking with rage,

"Is this one of your boyfriends, slut?" He yelled at me, the bone in my wrist snapped and I bowled over in

agony. The stranger gently supported me as I screamed in pain. Aidan bones were popping and cracking and he was convulsing in a weird way. What the hell was wrong with him?

The stranger carefully lifted me off my feet and carried me to the far side of the diner. When I next looked at Aidan I could no longer recognise his face. He had sharp teeth and fangs, his eyes were entirely black. I trembled in fear.

"Run!" I yelled at the stranger, but he placed himself between me and Aidan.

"Don't move." He said smoothly.

Aidan now a hideous werewolf leapt out of the booth and charged at the stranger leaping into the air. I closed my eyes tight not wanting to look. In seconds there was a huge yelp and the sound of glass shattering. Had Aidan miscalculated his jump and flown over our heads out the window? I opened my eyes and saw the stranger standing in front of me and beyond him was the broken glass.

"What happened?" I asked confused.

"I threw him out the window." The stranger replied.

"How?"

"By pushing him- gently." He smirked.

"Who are you?" I asked.

At that moment Aidan reappeared in the window.

"Attack again and I will slaughter you wolf." the stranger said calmly.

"You have no authority over the girl." Aidan said.

"She is carrying a member of the imperial vampire family." The man replied.

My heart stopped beating. What did he say? I was carrying a vampire? Suddenly I remembered the first night I had ever spent with a guy- it was a vampire. It was Rudolph. Rudolph was my baby's daddy?

"Shit no!" I yelled by accident.

"You are carrying my cousin's child. I am Rudolph's cousin Prince Luc of the imperial vampire court." He said.

"She is mine!" Aidan howled.

"This girl is under vampire protection and will be moving to the imperial court so she can receive the best possible care."

Aidan began to change back into a man, he stood in the diner in ripped clothes covered in bloody scratches,

"I love her. Please." he said desparatly.

"You lost control and almost killed her." Prince Luc said gravely.

Aidan ignored Prince Luc and directly spoke to me, "Steph, I'm sorry. You don't understand how intense my emotions are for you." He pleaded.

"I'm sorry Aidan." I said softly.

Prince Luc careful picked up in his arms, "I will take you to the palace where you will be looked after."

"I want to go home." I replied.

Luc shook his head, "Sorry. It's too late."

Chapter 48

Dark Black Magic- chapter 40- the monster

Skyler POV

I stood in the doorway watching Matt and Dalton disappear into the alley. Rayne waited behind to say goodbye. I didn't want him to leave me again, not so soon.

"Stay here," he said, "I'll come back with Stephanie in a short while."

"Rayne," I said my breath catching in my throat. "Be careful you're not at full strength. Let Matt and Dalton do the heavy work."

"I'm strong, Skyler." He said.

I grabbed his t-shirt and kissed him and broke away quickly. Rayne stood motionless. Closing my eyes I said softly, "Go."

When I opened my eyes he was gone. All the emptiness I had felt without him returned to me. Hugging myself I shut the door and went back into my bedroom. I was tired and my body was screaming for sleep but I was too worried to sleep. Apart of me wanted to go looking for Stephanie because she once risked her safety to save me. Unable to sleep I went and sat at the window and looked out into the alleyway waiting for Rayne and Stephanie to return.

For twenty minutes I watched a black cat pick through rubbish in the alleyway. My eyes felt heavy and I rested my head against the window pane.

Glass cracked and I felt myself falling and my body thudded against the cold wet floor. Rain spat on my skin. I opened my eyes and saw the window I had fallen through. The frame must have rotted or something, I thought feeling dizzy. Looking to my right I saw a black blur moving towards me. Was it

the black cat I saw earlier? The blur got larger and larger and larger.

"I am here." it spoke in the same terrible voice that haunted my dreams.

Was this a dream? I tried to move and felt pain shooting through my body. The monster came into view. It had the powerful body of lion with great claws and the head of bird of prey, its beak lined with jagged teeth.

It stood over me and bent its great head down and sniffed me,

"You are no longer human." it said curiously.

Taking another breathe in, it looked at me and said, "What are you?"

My mind was to muddled to reply. My vampire brother had biten me but I had not changed. I was warned that I was different but I had no idea how. Helplessly I tried to call for Rayne. A giant clawed foot pinned my body down.

"I wonder what you taste like?" It said.

I closed my eyes as the monster giant beak opened up to eat me. The monster made a funny noise that sounded like a 'huh?' and then it suddenly roared angrily and spun round releasing me. Opening my eyes the monster growled, "Did you do that?"

Puzzled I shook my head.

"Something pulled my tail and my tail is very sensitive." it said indignantly.

"I did not pull your tail." I said.

The monster eyed me suspiously then placed his giant foot on my tiny torso once again. Bending down to take a bite out of me it suddenly roared again. This time it jumped off me and searched around yelling, "Something pulled my tail!"

It grabbed trashcans and emptied them on to the pavement and opened dumpsters and looked inside. While it turned it's back a hand fell across mouth and voice whispered, "Don't scream."

I looked up at small blonde girl who I recognised from my dreams- Mia. Confused I looked at Mia and

the monster both figments of my sleep. This had to be a dream I thought.

Mia lifted me like a rag doll over her shoulder and walked carefully away. The monster roared, "Vampire!"

Mia swore under her breathe and started running.

"Crap, crap, crap..." she kept repeating as the monster came thundering towards us.

"Rayne." I said weakly.

"He's busy with the werewolves." Mia said turning a corner.

"Rayne can help us." I said weakly.

Luc POV

I bundled the human into a car to be taken back to the court. The King and Queen will want to see her. It's just my luck that we finally get Rudolph deported and then Mia prophesises the arrival of his daughter. The girl, Stephanie, begs for her parents but I ignore her. The guards have already visted her parents and brain washed them into thinking she was away at a

special school. I remembered when I first took Mia away from her mother we had to use a similar method. Thinking of my lovely wife I reached out to her. We had a unique telepathic bond which let us communicate to each other.

'Where are you?' I asked.

I knew she would be safe at home with our twins away from danger.

'Running away from a chicken on steroids.' Mia replied.

'That better be a game you're playing with the children.' I said.

'The children are with Sophie- I kinda disobeyed your orders.'

My heart stopped beating and I felt a cold rush of adrenaline shoot through my body, 'Where are you?'

'Just passing the library.'

'I'm coming.' I said moving quickly through the streets.

I could feel her tiredness and exhaustion beating at me. I needed to get to Mia quickly. Angirly I yelled at her, 'Why did you disobey my orders.'

'I'm your wife not your servant Luc.' she snapped back.

'If you stayed put you would not be in danger.'

'Skyler would have died, I had this dream warning me.'

'And you did not think to share this with me.'

'It's not that simply.' Mia replied holding something back.

'Why?' I yelled.

'Because you're not the one that is suppose to kill the demon.'

'Who is?'

Mia went quiet. I could sense her rising trepidation. The library was just ahead but Mia was nowhere to be seen. Then it occurred to me. Mia was lying.

Mia POV

Luc was angry, really, really pissed off. He had arrived at the library and found no monster. The truth was we were in the opposite end of the town running away from the monster. Luc and I could not defeat a demon. We lacked that power. The difference between us is that I would run and Luc would fight. If he choose to fight then he would die. Because of this I had to lie to protect him. The only one who could save us now was Skyler. She was the daughter of a God. Only she and her brother had the power to slay the chicken. Skyler's head lolled about on my shoulder.

"Wake up and do something!" I yelled at her.

Skyler lifted her head weakly, "I can't." she replied.

"You're the only one who can kill it."

"Are you joking? I'm not a fighter."

"If you do not fight then humanity and the world as we know it is screwed. This is the turning point Skyler. Sophie has done her part now it is your turn."

"Who the hell is Sophie and why did she need my boyfriend's help."

"Jealously will not help us honey."

"And what exactly is that thing?"

"An assassin sent to kill you. Rayne killed its brother not so long ago."

"So how am I suppose to kill it?"

"By using your freaky mojo powers?"

"I'm a hedge witch, I have no freaky powers. I do gentle chants and make stuff. I'm not a warrior."

I stopped and put Skyler on the ground.

"Look, this is it," I said pointing at the monster raging towards us. "Kill it or let the whole world die. Fight or die. Make your choice."

I leapt up onto the top of a building and looked down. Skyler was staring at me in bemusment. She had to have a power. There had to be something about her. I saw her defeat the demon. Luc was in the back of my mind searching for answers.

'Mia you are playing a dangerous game. Do you remember what happened the last time I thought I lost you?' He said.

'Luc, I love you.' I said shutting myself off from him.

Down below the demon had finally caught up. It leapt on to Skyler pinning her to the floor.

"Glory to the demon king," It hissed licking the bloody cut on her face. "I will enjoy devouring you."

"Rayne help..." she whispered.

My heart stopped, Skyler had given up? Why was she not fighting. She had a power. I know she did. Why wasn't she using it? If she died then so did everybody else. The monster opened its tremendous mouth revealing glinting sharp teeth. I screamed at Skyler to do something.

The monster made a hissing noise then suddenly slumped onto one side. Skyler and I stared at. What had happened? Nothing had happened.

"What did you do?" I asked jumping down from the building.

Skyler sat up confused. "Nothing. Absolutely nothing."

Nervously I looked down at the corpse of the demon. A strange smoke was pouring out its mouth. Skyler stood up slowly and looked at it.

"I did nothing," she repeated, "It knocked me down and..."

"Licked you."

"So?"

"It licked your blood and died," I said, "That's your power, your blood is toxic to demons. Christ, I thought you were going to start shooting fireballs or something-" My sentence was cut short as tall shadow descended over me. Weakly I smiled at Luc who had a face like a thunder cloud.

"Hello... Luc." I said dryly.

Chapter 49

Dark Black Magic- chapter 41- the queen

Skyler POV

The man towered over Mia eclipsing her small frame. He was very handsome but something about him seemed unhinged. He looked over to the dead demon and then looked to me,

"Did you do that?" he asked.

"Not really. I'm not some warrior chick that lopped off the monsters head." I said in all honesty.

"Her blood is lethal to demons." Mia said.

"And did you know that before the monster died?" Luc asked Mia.

Mia shook her head. Luc swore and grabbed Mia's shoulder's,

"You could have died Mia! Our children would have been motherless. " Luc said angrily.

"I trust my visions Luc- unlike you! I knew Skyler would pull through."

Before Luc could reply Rayne shimmered in front of me. Luc grabbed Mia protectively. Both the men stared at each other. Gently I touched Rayne's shoulder.

"It's okay. Mia saved me." I said.

Rayne looked at me his fingers gently touching the cuts on my face,

"How did this happen?" He asked.

I pointed to the corpse of the demon monster. Rayne looked at it.

"I killed one a couple of days ago. Why did you not come to me for help?" Rayne asked.

"Good question." Luc added staring at Mia.

Mia threw her hands up into the air, "Because Skyler was the one destined to kill it. She needed to kill it for us to find out about her blood. "

Rayne went to touch an open wound on face muttering, "What is wrong with your blood?"

"Don't touch me!" I panicked.

Rayne withdrew away from me his eyes full of hurt. It never occurred to me until then that my blood could be poisonous to Rayne. One drop could kill him. How would we over come it? What if I accidently bit my lip and kiss him, or caught the egde of my tongue- a single kiss would kill him. Stepping back away from him Rayne painfully watched me putting a good distance between us.

"You can't come near me Rayne. My blood is poisonous to demons. One drop would kill you." I explained.

Rayne face hardened ignoring Luc and Mia he pulled me into his arms and jumped off the ground and into the air. Two huge black wings thumped against the

air propelling us into the night sky angrily I yelled at him,

"You're going to get yourself killed!"

I was covered in grazes where I had fallen through the window payne on to the road. There wasn't a lot of blood but it was enough to kill that horrible black monster thing. Closing my eyes I rested head against his shoulders and muttered, "Idiot, let me go."

Rayne dived back towards the earth, wind whistled around us. I held on tightly, until he stepped back on solid ground. Opening my eyes I could see we were high up in the mountains. Snow lightly dusted the ground glittering in the moon light. I turned to Rayne and was surprised to see him lifting up his top. He took one look at me and said, "Take off your clothes."

I blinked in shock.

"Excuse me?"

Rayne repeated the order, "Strip off."

My whole face was on fire.

"Are you crazy! What the hell is wrong with you! Its freezing up here. I need to go home and sort out these cuts. And you need to stay away from me."

"That's not happening." He said throwing me over his shoulder.

Clenching my fists I beat at his back, "Put me down!"

"Its not happening, darling."

"Rayne, my blood can kill you."

"I don't believe you." He said flatly.

My mind was spinning. He saw the dead demon. Why was he being so obstinate? Suddenly he dropped me. Splash. I sank into warm bubbling water that soothed my cuts and grazes. Rayne slid into the hot spring beside me and swam to the other side.

"I told you to take off your clothes." He said brushing his wet black hair out of his eyes.

"You never told me that you were taking me to a hot spring." I snapped back.

"So you thought I brought you half way up a mountain to ravish you?"

I sank deeper into the water and muttered, "Maybe."

"You're half right." He said swimming towards.

I swam backwards, "Rayne, you need to stay away-"

"Your blood will not harm me. It knows me, like your body does, it would never reject me." He reached out and took my hand and pressed a tiny kiss on to a small graze. Looking up he flashed a grin,

"See, I did not melt or keel over and die." he said.

I watched him carefully for a few fearful seconds. Rayne gently closed in on me wrapping his arms around me. I could feel his need and desire beating at me. The last few days had been agony for both of us. All it was my fault. I had been the one who got frightened and ran away. Tearfully I bowed my head,

"I'm sorry Rayne for all the trouble I have caused."

"We are together now and nothing can separate us- not even your venomous blood or an overgrown chicken." He said.

A small laugh managed to escape to the surface through all the saddness and fear. Pressing into me, Rayne caught my mouth with his. All the anxiety and saddness melted away into one exquisite moment. My whole body was aching for his.

"Why are your clothes still on?" He asked irritably.

"I don't know." I murmured absently.

Seconds later my t-shirt and jeans were floating in the water. I loved the feel of his skin against mine. Melting into him I let him carry me away from reality where there were no monsters or crazy prophecies or angry black chickens. There was just me and him. Holding on tightly I looked up at the stars and prayed I could stay in this moment forever. Our passions climaxed and I floated hazily in the water. Rayne pulled me close,

"We need to go and check on Stephanie and the others."

"My clothes are soaking wet." I sighed but before I could blink Rayne teleported us back into our

bedroom. Rayne carefully placed me on the bed. Sleepily I yawned,

"I'm so tired."

"Tomorrow we will seek Mia and Luc."

"What about Aidan?"

"I returned him to his pack. Poor guy was really torn up over Stephanie."

"I think he expected too much too soon."

"She was his soul mate. How would you feel if I cheated on you?"

"Devastated."

"Exactly."

"But I'm different. Stephanie has been severely depressed and suicidal for the last few months then suddenly she is turned into immortal. She is liberated. Her hair grows back, guys are attracted to her, and she feels good about herself and suddenly she wants to have a good time. But then Aidan comes along and wants to chain her down."

"Do you think I chained you down?"

"No. You released me from my chains and that's why I love you so much."

"I still think Stephanie acted like a spoilt little wanton."

"Do you think Aidan will forgive her?"

"I don't know." Rayne replied.

Her Imperial Highness Queen Sophia POV

My husband Casper the great King of the Vampires was absent from court today. Why? Because he couldn't be bothered to get out of bed. Watching him blissfully asleep completely unaware of the horrible evening I had because of his lie in. Court had not gone well today. My proposed idea of a society of equal opportunities went down like a lead balloon. All the old stuck up aristocrats laughed off my ideas and my position as Queen. All of them thought the King should have married a vampire that was born a vampire- not bitten like I was. Unsupported and out numbered I was jeered out of the court. If Casper had gotten his lazy ass out of bed and helped me things

would have gone better. I grabbed a pillow and threw it at his head. His body jerked up, blonde hair spilling over his face, heavy lashed eyes gazed sleepily up at me. I stood at the foot of the bed arms folded across my chest frowning at him. Casper gulped.

"How was court?" he asked feebly.

I grabbed another cushion and flung it at him. He ducked quickly and avoided impact.

"Where were?" I said.

"Here, asleep." He said.

"You should have been down stairs with me, facing the court as a united front. I got massacred in their today. No one wants to listen to the bitten Queen. I got laughed out of court Casper."

"I'm sorry baby."

"You have no idea how bad it was."

"Babe if they upset you I will have their heads placed on spikes outside the castle and I mean that."

"I don't want anybody dead, I just want you to get out of bed sometimes."

"Come here." Casper said.

Reluctantly I walked over to the edge of the bed. Casper grabbed my arm and pulled me into bed next too him.

"You should have stayed in bed too. I was really disappointed when I woke up and found an empty space next to me." he said,

"Casper, I'm so pissed off with you right now nothing you do or say is charming."

"What if I kissed you?"

"Your face would feel the back of my hand."

"Threats of violence? You must be mad."

"Don't mock me."

"I'm not, I just find you very sexy when you get cross."

"I don't feel sexy. I feel really pissed off that you couldn't be there for me just this one time."

"Aw come on Sophie don't bust my balls over this."

"Fine, if you're not going to take this seriously Casper then I'm not sleeping in this bed tonight." I said jumping off the bed before Casper could catch me. Casper got out of bed wrapping the bed sheet around his waist following me across the room.

"Sophie, Sophie-" he called after me.

I left the room seething. Casper stood in the doorway of the bedroom calling after me,

"Sophie come back and talk. I have no pants on, I'm not going to chase you through the castle naked." he said.

"You should wear pyjama's to bed like a normal human being."

"Maybe I'll borrow your duck night shirt!"

"You could if you hadn't burnt it to the ground like all my other possessions." I yelled over my shoulder.

Casper was a powerful vampire but he was also an emotional vampire. When we first met he threw a little temper tantrum that resulted in our house being burnt to the ground. I lost everything petty

much, including my over sized duck night shirt my grandma had brought me. I stomped down the corridor and bumped into a familiar face. Nico, the captain of the guards and a close friend.

"Lover's tiff." He asked.

"You have no idea what I have to put up with. Have you had any news from Jacques?"

In the beginning when I first turned into a vampire Casper kept me away from the court. He didn't even tell me he was a King. We all lived together in a house with Nico his body guard and Jacques his best friend. Jacques was a legend. I remember him sliding down the banister in my bra and fighting with Casper. I loved him to pieces but he ran away. It's a complicated story but I ended up going to this vampire school where I met Christie who was engaged to this tool called Rudolph- it was an arranged marriage neither one wanted to marry the other. So at the school there was this big ball and Rudolph decided to publically snub Christie by not asking her to the ball. Jacques decides to be a hero and asks Christie to the ball. Then at the ball

everything exploded. Rudolph and Jacques got into a fight and Jacques announced he was stealing Christie away from Rudolph- and no one has seen Jacques or Christie since. Jacques asked Casper's permission but Casper refused. Jacques is the original man-ho, he is by no stretch of the imagination monogamous. Currently we have Nico and the whole guard searching for them.

"Nothing, we hear reports here and there but Jacques is evading our efforts." Nico replied.

"Crap. Keep looking. I love Jacques but he is going to break Christie's heart."

"We shall keep looking but in the meantime Luc and Mia have returned have arrived." Nico smiled.

vote or comment or do both ^.^

Chapter 50

Dark Black Magic- chapter 42- jobs and roles

Stephanie POV

This place was something out of period drama. I was in a huge castle surrounded by ladies in long dresses and men in button down coats with fancy hats. The whole atmosphere was surreal. I felt like I had jumped out of the frying pan into the fire. Aidan and Loki had gone mad and Rudolph's family had decided to kidnap me and take me to vampire lala-land. Shit. This is so messed up. I'm never going near boys again. They have brought me nothing but grief.

Luc marched me through the castle's great hall. All around us I could feel the other vampires watching

me. I caught a glimpse of a few vampire directly looking at me, one old vampire lady had an expression of utter disgust as passed by. Another vampire pulled out a handkerchief and covered their nose as I walked past. Did I smell? I put deodorant on- I tried to do the thing when you try and sniff yourself without drawing attention to yourself.

"What business does he have bring that an abomination here." I heard one vampire whisper to another.

Luc immediately snapped his head in the direction of the whisper and glowered at a group of vampires. Confused I asked;

"What's their problem?"

"Don't worry about it." Luc shrugged.

How can I not worry about it? People might as well be laughing and pointing at me. There is no way I can just brush this off like it is nothing. So I asked Luc again,

"What is their problem Luc?"

Luc responded with an irritable exhalation and replied, "Nothing."

It was like trying to get blood out of a stone. We left the hall down a great corridor with high ceilings decorated with tapestries and suits of armour. The décor had a very medieval feel to it. At the end of the hall was a pair of great wooden doors guarded by a pair of vampires in uniforms. As Luc approached they bowed curtly and opened the doors into a great room with two thrones in the centre. There was a flurry of footsteps as a group of guards approached us. A voice in the middle ordered,

"Thanks, but that is enough you go back to what you were doing. I don't need to be guarded."

"Sophie," Luc sighed, "Do not be disobedient. Casper is doing this for your safety."

"I can't even see you, Luc." The voice replied.

"Your safety is number one."

"So are my orders. You and the guards can go and leave me and Stephanie to speak."

"But-"

"Don't sass me Luc."

"I'm way older than you little girl."

"But you are not the Queen so vamoouse."

Luc and the guards defeated headed out of the room, revealing to me the young lady who was speaking. Sophie was beautiful. She had brown hair and brown eyes, vibrant and rich. She was very pretty but had a strange earthy beauty. She smiled warmly at me,

"Sorry for everything. I know this is not what you wanted but please believe me when I say this is for your safety."

It was sweet of her to apologise but it was me who should be apologising. This mess was because of my actions and poor choices. Aidan wouldn't have attacked me if I hadn't of slept with that sleaze ball Rudolph.

"Aidan attacked me because he was provoked." I said.

"The danger was not from the werewolf. There is a powerful demonic force rising up and Mia has forseen your child as apart of this saga."

"Really?"

"Mia is an oracle, she sees the future. She foresaw your child being conceived."

"Couldn't she have warned me about Rudolph?"

"No,"

"I would have really appreciated that."

"Don't beat yourself up about it. All vampires have special gifts and Rudolph has the gift of sexual lure. You fell victim to his charms like many others."

"So how is my baby involved in all of this?"

"We do not know yet. But we will protect you and the child until it is safe to go home."

"Thanks, I guess?"

"Your friends will be joining you soon. Very soon the fight will begin." she said.

The vampires were very hospitable. They gave me a beautiful room located in a western turret, with my own bathroom and kitchen stocked with human food. Servants were available at any time of day and night to see to my needs. A pair of guards were also assigned as keepers to me. Their job was to make sure I did not run away- although honestly nowadays I don't have the energy to run. My room over looked the forest and the rest of the castle. It was very picturesque. I was allowed to explore any part of the castle except one of the old towers which had lost its roof and suffered a fire. There were also vast gardens to explore too. The vampires said they would like me stay here permanently after I had my baby. That way the child would be raised in the vampire community. I had no idea, but Rudolph was royalty, which means I'm carrying a royal baby. That's why I get VIP treatment. I should be happy now I'm away from school, my crazy boyfriends and ex-lovers but I'm not. Since being turned into an immortal I've never spent a long period of time alone. I've always been with Skyler, or Greg and co or with Aidan or a lover. But for the last hour I've been alone with myself with

no distractions and I have thought about everything that has happened to me over the past months and suddenly it has dawned on me I am no longer Stephanie. Okay it sounds weird but before I turned into an immortal I was this lost shy girl crushed by depression and now I look at my present self and I think where has that girl gone? That girl wouldn't have flung herself at men, or mistreated Aidan, or knocked herself up. What happened to Stephanie? I don't recognize me any more and the more I think about it the more I don't like myself. All those things I did to those boys, all things I let them do to me- this isn't Stephanie. This is somebody else and I don't want this person to raise my child. I want to be a good mother. Looking out over the tree tops I could hear the wolves calling. Poor Aidan. I don't know why I did not love him. Maybe Stephanie would have loved him. Me, however, definitely not. Perching on the window sill I hugged my knees into my chest and watched the night. It was only half an hour later when a knock on my door disturb me from my spot by the window. Three servants entered with a tall familiar handsome man. When Loki had taken me to

Italy he had introduced me to this man- or for use of a better word this immortal. Giacamo was a rich Italian aristocrat who had lived for many centuries despite looking like a guy in his early thirties. Bowing slightly he turned to me.

"I hope I'm not disturbing you." He said formally.

"No, no." I said jumping up revealing my belly bump, immediately my hands covered the swell.

Giacomo looked at the bump and whispered something in Italian that I did not understand. My cheeks flushed red and I felt ashamed. Giacomo reading my expression threw his hands up into the air;

"No, I'm not judging you- I'm only shocked to see how fast your pregnancy has progressed." He said apologetically.

"That's okay." I said awkwardly feeling slightly relieved.

There was a weird moment of silence that passed between us. Giacomo stared at me lost for words. Was this good or bad?

"Umm, so what brings you to these parts?" I said pleasantly.

"Bussiness. I spend much time in the vampire city."

"Thank you for dropping by, it's nice to see a familiar face."

"When I heard the vampires had captured you I came here straight away. Are they treating you alright?"

"So far so good."

"I want you to know that you can call me for anything."

I smiled and thanked him politely before the servants ushered him out the room explaining to him that I needed rest. Giacomo said he would be back to visit me again. As he left I had this sick feeling in my gut that Giacomo had come here about the promise I had made him. While we were in Italy I said that after Aidan and I had finished I would seek Giacomo out and the two of us would marry. We were both immortals and it made sense for us to marry so we would not be alone. But I had always imagined

marrying him after Aidan died- not before. But circumstances had changed. Giacomo was hell of a lot more weathlier than Aidan- he was also more stable and responsible. I had to think of Dahlia now and not myself. Aidan did attack me- but I guess it was a crime of passion, he just found out that I was having fun behind his back. God I felt like such a hypocrite. One minute I'm telling Aidan I can't be with him because I want to have more fun and the next I'm thinking about settling down with Giacomo.

Rubbing my temples I got into bed. I need to think about this.

Skyler POV

The next day at work I had to do a lot of explaining. The whole town had woken up to the aftermath of a werewolf rampage but the newspapers blamed it on a motorcylce gang. Rayne had kicked Aidan out of town and warned him not to set foot in the town. A small part of me felt sorry for Aidan but a huge part was angry at him for hurting Stephanie. Even when emotions are running high violence is not an excuse. Rayne felt much the same way. He would have

probably killed him if it hadn't been for that horrible monster thing. Luc and Mia had invited us to stay at the vampire castle and visit Stephanie in a few days time. They had even extended the invitation to Greg, Bea and Kai. Bea and Kai were really excited but Greg was really flat about the whole thing. He wanted to see Stephanie he just didn't want to see her in a vampire castle. Anything demonic, vampire or werewolf Greg did not like. Even so I don't think that would stop Greg from seeing Stephanie. He had already set up a baby fund donation pot so we could buy Stephanie and her baby a gift. We were worried about Stephanie but the vampires promised to take good care of her and if they didn't they would have to face Rayne.

After work I went back to my pokey little apartment. Rayne had swept up the glass from the sidewalk and called somebody to replace the window- another bill I didn't need. Stepping through the front door I yelled, "I'm home."

There was no reply.

Going into the kitchen I saw a note scribbled on the table,

'Meet me at the Wendell's Café.'

Was he taking me out to dinner? I couldn't help but smile to myself. I quickly changed into something more smart and ran out the door. The café in question was a French style bistro on the main street that turned into a wine bar at night. When I entered the bar it was filling up. Couples in dimly lit alcoves stare at each other while groups of friends chatted round the bar. Peering through the crowd I couldn't see Rayne. I noticed a group of guys stood at the far side of the bar staring at a large group of women on the other side of the bar. The men seemed angry and disappointed, they look up then look down staring at their twenty dollar glass of red. A ripple of girlish laughter radiated from the group.

"We can't compete with frickin' cocktail dude." One guy spat between gritted teeth.

Curiously I approached the bar and leaned over.

Oh my God.

Rayne was in a tight black shirt swinging a vodka bottle over his shoulder, smiling pleasantly at the girls. Rayne had got a job. My heart gave a sickening lurch as he causually flirted with the girls as they slipped him dollar notes. I didn't know what to say. I was speechless. Getting a job was fine but when I saw him doing that I felt like I was watching pole dance in front of some sleazily perverts. Feeling jealous and sick I took a few steps back and hit something soft and lumpy.

"Hello gorgeous." Alcohol fuelled breath wheezed over me. I turned to meet a girl's worse romantic nightmare. Fat, comb over, BO problem, fifty something old man/pervert. I flinched as the fat man grabbed my hand and introduced himself as, "Lionel Wendell, the owner of this establishment." he panted lifting my hand to his flabby puckered jowls. Repulsed I wanted to pull away but I was afraid to cause a scene. The lips collided against my skin like a dead oily fish sending waves of revulsion up my arm and through my body. There was a horrible sucking noise and then Lionel lifted his head and smiled at me. This was nasty. This was seriously nasty.

Helplessly I looked over to Rayne who was making another cocktail. Lionel without warning flung his arm around me,

"Come on sugar let me show you a good time." Wendell hand skimmed over shoulders, down my back, and travelling dangerously south. Before his hand cupped my ass Rayne had hurled himself over the bar sending drinks flying over shocked customers. Wendell was like a rabbit caught in the headlights as Rayne placed himself in front of him. Wendell gulped. The whole bar had fallen silent. All eyes were on us. Pulling at Rayne sleeve I whispered quietly,

"Don't make a scene."

I wanted to leave but Rayne lifted a hand silencing me. Wendell looked like he was about to have a heart attack. Rayne expression lightened,

"Boss, this is my girlfriend and if you or any other man touch her I will kill you all. I;m a very jealous boyfriend. Now you and everyone is going to forget that this ever happened." Rayne smiled.

Everyone in the bar seemed to carry on chattering like nothing had happened. Wendell's face smiled warmly at Rayne,

"Has your shift finished?" He asked Rayne.

Rayne put his arm around me and I could see the crowd of girls faces drop as Rayne said,

"Yeah, I'm done for tonight. My girlfriend is here to pick me up." Rayne smiled at me.

"Very good son. I'll see you tomorrow." He smiled.

With that Rayne lead me out the bar. Out on the street I said,

"You got a job?"

"Yeah, I saw how you were struggling with bills and I wanted to help."

"How long have you been working?"

"Since 11am. I hate it but you won't allow me to get money and fast cars the 'easy' way."

"You mean the dishonest way." I said. Rayne had once brought home an expensive car after hypnotizing the sales man to give it too him for free.

"How's Stephanie?" Rayne asked changing the subject.

"Okay. We've got an invite to see her."

"Good, you'll get to meet Sophie."

Another jealous pang made me pull away from Rayne as we walked together. Rayne stopped aware of the sudden distance between us.

"You mean the Sophie you were protecting?" I said quietly.

Rayne stared at me- "Yes."

My eyes glazed over and I nodded and walked ahead of him. I knew I was just being silly but I couldn't help what I felt. Rayne caught up with me and grabbed my hand pulling me against his chest. Suddenly he was right there in my face.

"I helped Sophie to protect you. Without Sophie you will die and vice versa. If anything happened to me

Sophie consort would protect you in order to protect Sophie- if that makes any sense."

His gray eyes pleaded with mine to believe him and I did. Kissing him lightly on the lips we walked home and went to bed.

Gwendolyn du Coudray POV

Loki was dead.

My consort was dead.

My father was dead.

Skyler and Queen Sophia had chosen to fight.

Heavily pregnant I was forced into hiding in the lower realms of Hell. The big boss was looking for me. If the Devil caught me and my son, we would be both destroyed. My plans had failed miserably but I had not completely given up hope. I did have allies and although they may not be as powerful as Rayne there were a great number of them. After my birth I would take my army up to the surface and wage war against Skyler and the vampire Queen Sophie. Then I would kill all their friends and all their family. I had

already killed Sophie's mother and father. I had also killed Skyler's Grandmother. None of which gave me a sadistic thrill. All their murders were the result of strategic planning to get my son to where he belongs.

Chapter 51

Dark Black Magic: Chapter 43- Plea

Another day, another dollar. Work was much the same. Kai called Stephanie to check she was okay. Everything seemed fine. Stephanie said she had friend visit her from Italy and that she was going to him later today. She swore to us that they were only friends and that she was not screwing about. Poor Aidan. He had disappeared off the face of the planet. The town at night was peacefully quiet instead of being filled with the loud noisy vibrations of angry engines speeding and racing down the highstreet. Rayne said that Aidan's gang had moved on east to another town. He thought it was unlikely that Aidan would ever come back again. I wonder if in time

Stephanie would come to regret her decisions. People were strange in the way they let lives unfold like some badly written soap opera. Stephanie was a nice girl but she was not perfect. She had this selfishness about her which put her feelings before the feelings of others. Most girls would die to have a sweet dedicated drop-dead gorgeous boyfriend instead of having a string of meaningless flings. But then Stephanie was her own person. I hope she is a better mother than lover.

When the day came to an end I went back home to an empty house. Rayne, Dalton and Matt had all gone out to work leaving me home alone. Perfect opportunity for a bubble bath. Lighting some tea candles and playing soft relaxing music I sank into the bubble bath and closed my eyes. This was bliss. I sat in the bath until my fingertips began to wrinkle. Then I got out slipped into some jogging bottoms and a t-shirt and relaxed on the bed with a book about herbs and their medicinal properties. I liked being alone but I always felt empty. Without Rayne I did not feel complete and as the time passed I began to become more restless. I wanted to send him a text

message asking him to come back home but I realised how childish that would be. Instead I went into the kitchen and made myself a cup of green tea and sat in the kitchen staring at the wall clock. When the clock finally hit midnight Rayne came in. I couldn't help but feel annoyed. Tomorrow I would be at work so this evening was the only real chance I had to spend time with Rayne. I scowled at him as he entered the kitchen.

"Busy night."

Rayne took one look at me and read the expression on my face. I felt an argument brewing.

"Don't whine at me Sky. You wanted to do this the hard way." He said referring back to the time I had refused to let Rayne use his demonic powers to steal and con people out of money and cars ect. Irritably I got up and headed to the bedroom yelling over my shoulder that I was going to bed. I heard Rayne pick up the mug I had left on the table and throw it against the wall. Yip- we were going to have an argument.

Turning on my heel I marched straight back into the kitchen.

"What the hell was that?" I said staring down at the broken cup.

"I'm pissed off."

"Why are you pissed off?"

"Your stupid human morals are pissing me off."

"Why?"

"Because neither of us need to work Sky! I could easily arrange financial income so that we would never have to work or be apart from one another."

"Stealing and cheating is not an honest living."

"Honest living is not giving us much babe. We can't even afford a crappy car."

"I beginning to think I should have gone to bed instead of waiting up for you."

"Skyler, when that bitch has her satanic baby that's it- game on. While she is heavily pregnant there is no chance she is risking herself or her baby. We will not

be attacked.So we can screw about earning money from boring jobs but the moment she has the baby that is it we will have to go into hiding."

"I'm not hiding from anything. I've just settled down here. I have friends and a life, and I'm prepared to fight for that."

"I know you are baby but I'm not prepared to lose you. You will go into hiding and I will fight for you."

"Mia said I have to fight or we lose."

"I couldn't care less what Mia thought." Rayne said slamming his fist against the wall.

The outburst violence frightened me and I instinctively took a step back putting distance between us. Rayne watched this gesture with a pained expression. The anger drained from his face and was replaced with regret. Taking a calm breathe he walked slowly towards me.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to frighten you." He said.

"You only made me jump." I lied.

Rayne closed in on me. He pulled me against him in a desperate embrace burying his face into my hair. Whispering softly he said.

"Please don't talk about fighting again. When the time comes I will fight for you."

"I won't let you. I have to do this myself and if I have to I will order you-"

Rayne didn't even let me finish. His arms dropped to his sides and he jerked away from me. The sudden separation let me feeling cold and lonely. I watched Rayne walk towards the door and stop to glance back at me.

"You're going to wind up dead." He threw over his shoulder before slamming the door.

Chapter 52

Dark Black Magic: Chapter 44- the umbrella

He slammed the door behind him leaving me alone. I knew he was right and I understood his frustration. Ultimately he was right- I could not fight. I had no secret ninja kick ass moves or magical destructive powers. All I had was venomous blood and yes bleeding all over my enemies was an option but I could at best only spare a few pints of blood before becoming ill. Rayne knew this and it terrified him. Grabbing my rain coat I ran out the door and followed him through the alley way.

"Rayne!" I called after him.

Rayne was walking out of the alley into the main street. By the time I had followed him out onto the main street he was half way up the street. I ran a little way then lost sight of him as he disappeared into a large noisy crowd of guys coming out of a sport bar. Drunkenly the men staggered down the road towards me. Looking down I tried not to draw any attention to myself as they walked towards me but as they came nearer I could here them saying to each other,

"Check her out."

Cringing I hoped they were talking about some other poor girl but I knew that this street was empty apart from the drunks and me. I looked up to see the group swaggering towards me. "Hey baby." One yelled at me.

A warm arm looped around my waist pulling me away from the crowd. Rayne had reappeared like my knight in shining armour. The men paused eyeing Rayne up and down and then moved quietly away. Rayne pulled me away

"You can't save yourself from a handful of drunks. How do you expect to save the world from a demon army?" Rayne asked me.

I didn't say anything. There was nothing to say. The warm security of Rayne's protective arm dropped away from me. Rayne silently stepped away from me. He clearly wanted to be alone right now. As he walked away I did not follow him. I let him be and turned around and begun to journey back to our home. All the way back I kept thinking how I could make myself stronger? Maybe Grandma had some sort of secret spell book of devastating magic or maybe I had some secret supernatural power that would vaporize my enemies. But deep down I knew I had none of this. Closing my eyes I prayed to Grandma for advice. How was I going to save myself and the world from this threat? I feel so small and insignificant and powerless and helpless. What could I do? The wind suddenly blew around me and I felt somebody standing behind me. Turning I found myself looking at handsome stranger. He had gorgeous brown untidy hair and deep brown eyes. For once I was glad Rayne wasn't here to rescue me.

Pushing the key in the front door I turned the lock was surprised to find the lock open. Had Rayne came back earlier? Walking inside I saw the kitchen door open and heard movement. Maybe it was Dalton or Matt. Suddenly there was a sound of mug breaking and I heard a stranger's voice cursing loudly, "Ah-

crap!"

Oh God there was an intruder in my house. What should I do? Call Rayne I guess, but his words stung me. For once in my life I am not going to be that helpless damsel in distress. Today is going to be a new start. Picking up an umbrella from the floor I wielded it like a rapier ready to strike. Tip toeing I crept towards the kitchen door and peered through. The stranger's back was turned towards me, but I could see he was a big guy. He looked young too- I could tell by the color of his brown hair. He wore denim and leather bomber jacket. Bikers like leather, maybe he was one of Aidan's gang. I crept closer and raised the umbrella above his head and then striked him on the head. The man must have been drinking something from one of my mugs because he dropped

the mug and began choking. I jumped back as he swung around to face. Blood was pouring out of his mouth. Nauseous hit me. Was he dying? Suddenly I regretted my actions and blurted out-

"Oh God- I'm so sorry! I'll call an ambulance." I said scrambling towards the phone.

"I'm not hurt." The guy replied rubbing his head.

"But you're bleeding." I said.

"That's not my blood. I was drinking some blood I found in your fridge-"

Before he said another word I had picked up the mis-shaped umbrella and was brandishing it at him.

"You're a vampire! Explain what the hell you are doing in my house or else" I snapped.

The stranger smiled in amusement at the umbrella.

"I'd rather see what terrible plans you and your umbrella have install for me." He replied.

Puffing myself up I waved the umbrella at him,

"I'm warning you."

"Go on." He smiled.

Improvising I slashed the air with the umbrella and then lunged at the stranger who side stepped and unarmed me at the same time. Taking my umbrella he turned it against me.

"Now I have the upper hand." He said.

"If you don't leave now, I'm going to scream and my boyfriend is going to come and kill you."

"I doubt that."

"He's a demon."

"Where is Rayne?"

"In the bathroom."

"You're not vey good lying. Did you have a fight?"

"That's none of your business. Now tell what you are doing in my house before I start screaming."

"Mia sent me."

"Why did Mia send you?"

"Because you need my help and I need your help."

"What's your name?"

"Jacques." He replied.

Chapter 53

Dark Black Magic: Chapter 45- Blood, sweat and tears

Skyler POV

Jacques lounged casually on my couch knocking back Matt's blood. He was drop dead gorgeous in a flirty bad boy kind of way. He had these amazing brown eyes that seem to catch you and hold your stare. Don't get me wrong- I didn't fancy the guy but it is impossible not admire someone that damn attractive. Jacques explained to me that he was the vampire King's best friend but had fallen into hot water after abducting the King's wife's best friend who just happened to be engaged to Rudolph- Stephanie's baby's Daddy....the whole thing was unfolding into a soap opera. Jacques was apparently sent to me by

Mia who was a close friend of Jacques. Mia had sent her warmest wishes but warned me to prepare to fight and meet my destiny- or something corny along those lines. Mia was gifted with foresight and could see into the past, present and future. Mia had sent Jacques to me because he and I, would stop this evil woman's son from destroying man kind blah, blah, blah.

Unfortunately, Jacques is not the warrior I was hoping for. Jacques is in fact a disgraced vampire aristocrat who gets by in life by working as a dance instructor. Pretty but not practical.

"Where's your girlfriend?" I asked.

"Christie, my little sweetpea, is staying in a motel nearby. My old buddy the King of the vampires will be wanting her back, so we have to hide until we get married."

"So why haven't you married her?"

"She has all these insecurities because of my colorful past, which-er- means that she will not marry me."

"She will not marry you?"

"She doesn't know her own mind. She wants to marry me but she just has these doubts about herself and me- and it's a little bit tiresome."

"What exactly is your plan to convince her to marry you?"

"I've got several. But at the moment I'm keeping under lock and key until I figure it out."

"Are you keeping her prisoner?"

"No way. She feels like I'm keeping her prisoner but it's only a matter of time before she comes around. Mia foreseen it and I know in my heart she is the girl for me."

"Can I meet her?"

"Not at the moment. She's always trying to escape and it's really annoying. When she has settled down then I'll take you around. Now that's enough about me! Tell me about you!" Jacques quickly changed topic.

"Well I came home today and found a vampire fugitive stealing blood from my fridge." I replied.

"Shame your boyfriend wasn't around to protect you."

For some reason that stung me. I knew Jacques was joking but he had a point. Rayne was so obsessive with me that I thought it would be impossible for someone to break into and enter our house without him noticing. Maybe there was some logical reason for it. Maybe Rayne was not supposed to know about Jacques. Rayne had just admitted he would not let me fight which would be a massive problem when the time came to fight. Maybe Jacques fitted into the grand plan somewhere.

"You need to go." I told Jacques flatly.

"I was hoping to meet your boyfriend."

"Rayne must not know about you. If you are to help me win this war with the demons then you need to be on team Skyler."

"Isn't Rayne on team Skyler?"

"No, he wants team Skyler sat at home wrapped in cottan wool when the fighting kicks off and Mia said that I need to fight or we all die."

"You must be a competent warrior if you destined to defeat an army demons, so why is Rayne interfering."

I didn't reply. I didn't want to admit my own lethal asset was my toxic blood. Uncomfortably I shifted in my seat. Jacques was watching me squirm with a curious expression, his face suddenly changed when the penny dropped-

"No way- you can't fight. No wonder Rayne wants you to stay at home."

"That's not fair. I do have one line of attack. My blood is poisonous to demons."

"So you are going to bleed all over them?"

"Suddenly I feel like I'm talking to Rayne all over again!"

"He's right Skyler! I'm no demonologist but I know demons are bad. Demons are personification everything that is bad about the world. These things would torture, rape and maim you before killing you. Don't you think Rayne would be a better candidate in dealing with those monsters?"

"I do. But that is not how it works. Mia said I have to fight- not Rayne. So if you want to help me then I need you on my side."

Jacques sighed and reluctantly said, "Fine. But if Rayne finds out I'm helping you- he would literally kill me."

"That's why I want you out of here, before he comes back."

"Okay I'll go. But before I do give me your cell number." Jacques said.

I scribbled my number on to a piece of paper and handed it to Jacques. Seeing him out he said,

"Any problems call me."

"I will."

We said goodbye and I went to bed before Rayne got in and we had another argument.

Stephanie POV

Mia came to visit me today. She had brought a small present for me to open. Excitedly she handed it to me as we both sat and drank tea. Tearing the colored

paper I unwrapped a baby name book which I opened and flicked through the first couple of pages.

"Thank you!" I said smiling at Mia.

"You're very welcome! Babies are so exciting but names are difficult. Luc and I argued for ages about what we are going to call our kids. He wanted something old and traditional while I wanted something cute and modern."

"I haven't really thought about names."

"Well I hope the book will give you a few ideas."

"I wonder if Giacomo knows any cool Italian names. He has been visiting you a lot recently. Are you two going out or something?"

"It's complicated. I'm an immortal and he's an immortal. His true love lived and died along time ago while my true love didn't turn out right. So we both agreed that we would marry in the future at some point in time so we wouldn't be alone."

"That's not very romantic."

"It's practical and with a baby on the way I can't think of myself."

"Sounds to me like you have condemn yourself for getting pregnant. Single yummy mommy's deserve love too."

"I don't think me and Aidan can work this out. Plus who would want to raise a baby in a forest! Giacomo has a massive house in Italy and a house here."

"Are you planning to marry him?"

"He asked me. He wants to take care of me and the baby."

"That's not a basis to get married on Stephanie!"

"Don't judge me Mia. I'm not stupid, you have Luc and I've got nobody."

"I'm not judging, I just don't want you to get married because you feel it is the last resort. Aidan probably loves you still. Wouldn't you prefer real happiness to something hollow?"

"I'm not looking for happiness. I want stability."

"This is your life Stephanie, I wish I could use my gift of foresight to advise you but this is a choice you have to make yourself."

"I know and this time I won't put myself first."

Mia and I changed subjects and talked about other things. I think what I had said to Mia had shocked her a little. I was willing to forsake true love for the sake of practicality- I don't know why I say true love, I didn't even know if Aidan was my true love. Either way Mia said she didn't feel well and left early. Leaving me by myself. At least I had the baby book, I started making a list of names I liked.

There was a knock at my door and Sophie entered.

"Help, I'm avoiding Casper." She whispered.

"Come in and lay low with me. I'm looking at baby names." I said.

Sophie came in and sat at the table.

"Casper and I are arguing all the time at the moment about the upcoming fight with that bitch Gwendolyn."

"Who is Gwendolyn? All this stuff is happening around me and I have no idea what it is all about."

"Gwendolyn is a demon who killed a few people including my mother to ensure her demonic off spring will destroy all humanity blah, blah, blah. Oh and she is raising an army in Hell to come and kill me and Skyler and pretty much everybody else on the planet. She's not very nice but we have not heard much from her lately. I think she is heavily pregnant and is hiding."

"What a saga."

"I know- what's wrong with living a nice quiet life."

"A life without vampires, werewolves and demons. Just imagine- no offense."

"I feel like that all the time, especially when Casper starts to get on my nerves. He's supposed to be the King but I'm the one running the kingdom. He just sits in bed all day being useless."

"Do you have any powers like Mia?" I asked, changing the topic.

"I'm a copycat. I can copy vampire powers and make them my own. So as vampires go I'm very strong. Strong enough that I can kill a demon."

"Have you killed a demon?"

"Once, a while ago."

There was a sudden knock at the door and a soldier peered in.

"Excuse me," he said, "The King is looking for your majesty."

"I know." Sophie rolled her eyes.

"You have been found." I said.

"I better find another hiding place."

"It's a beautiful evening you should go for a walk in the gardens. It is very beautiful." Sophie said as she got up and left.

I thought about it and decided I would go for a little wander. Leaving my room I went down the stairs where I was stop by a young soldier and asked if I had seen Mia. I said she had visited me but had left

because she did not feel well. The soldier went off and continued his search.

As I was passing through a dark hall I caught something out the corner of my eye. In the dark I could see someone balled up and sat in the darkest part of the hallway on the floor. I walked over to it slowly. It looked like Mia,

"Mia?" I whispered her name and her head jerked up terrifying the crap out of me.

"Jesus!" I cursed loudly clutching my heart. I was about to laugh it off but then I noticed that something was wrong with Mia. Something was really wrong with Mia.

Immediately I screamed for help and the guards came thundering up the corridor. Crouching next to Mia I wiped the away the blood covering her face with the back of my sleeve.

"What happened Mia?" I asked trying to look for any cuts or wounds where she bleeding from. Mia did not speak. She sat very still trembling. Then I saw it, a tiny drop of blood that seeped out of pore and

trickled down her face. Mia was not injured. She was sweating blood.

"Mia..." I said helplessly.

The guards arrived and sent for the doctor. I stayed with Mia holding her hand telling her it was going to be okay even though I had no idea that things would be fine. I don't think anything said really sunk in. Mia just sat there trembling. Impatiently I yelled to the soldiers to hurry up with the doctor. Then suddenly Mia's eyes flickered up at me and she said;

"The end will start with blood."

I was about to ask her more but Luc burst in pushing past the guards straight to Mia's side. He scooped her up like a ragdoll and ran to the doctor who had just arrived at the scene. Soon they were running down the corridor whisking Mia out view. I sat alone in the darkened corridor covered in blood.

What the hell had happened?

What did Mia mean, 'The end will start in blood'?

I pulled out my phone and texted Skyler. Whatever the hell Mia was on about probably had something to do with Skyler. I hit send and hoped Skyler would get this message. Out of the darkness I could hear my name being called. It was Luc, a really-really angry Luc. I pulled myself up as he came thundering towards me screaming-

"What did you do to her?"

"Nothing, I found her like this!" I said.

But Luc didn't believe me, something was wrong with him. He looked unhinged. Nervously I took a couple of steps back but Luc lunged at me. His body moved forward and mine was pulled back. Rayne had appeared, he pulled me back and with one hand he pushed Luc across the room with such power Luc smashed through a wooden sideboard placed along the wall. Vampires are strong but demons are way stronger.

"Are you okay?" Rayne asked.

I nodded my head even though I didn't feel okay. I felt shit scared. Rayne gently took my arm and said,

"I'll take you back to your room in a moment. I need to sort him out first." Rayne said looking at Luc who was staggering up.

"So you're the demon." Luc said dusting himself off.

Rayne moved with such speed I did not even see a blur. All I saw was Luc brushing himself off, then Luc in a headlock. Rayne spoke slowly and softly;

"Skyler is very fond of Stephanie which makes her very important to me. If you and your wife weren't so important I would have probably killed you both by now for abducting and attacking Stephanie-"

"Wait," I called out interrupting Rayne. "It's not his fault. Something is wrong with Mia." I said.

Rayne loosened his grip on Luc, "That's why I am here. Skyler showed me the text."

"If you two have done something to hurt Mia, then I swear you will pay." Luc yelled out.

Rayne irritably threw Luc to the ground,

"Stephanie and I did not do that. I'm god damn demon! I have better shit to do then torment your wife."

Luc didn't believe us, "I'll find out who did this and I'll tear them to pieces." He yelled getting up and stomping off.

Rayne made and irritated sound and remarked, "Ignore him, stupid old windbag."

"Do you think it would be safe for me to stay here?" I asked nervously.

"With the fight looming I'd say yes. There is an army soldiers here to protect you."

"I'm not worried about Gwendolyn- I'm worried about Luc."

"He won't hurt you. I've made it clear that if he hurts you he is jeopardizing Mia. He loves Mia too much to put her at risk." Rayne said.

I smiled and tried to be brave and let Rayne walk me back to my room. He left me and disappeared back home. I sat patiently in my room wondering what on

earth had terrified Mia so much that she would sweat blood.

Chapter 54

Dark Black Magic: Chapter 46- second opinion

Mia's condition worsened over the next few days. She lay in a catatonic state while Luc, her husband, sat at side slowly falling to pieces. King Casper began military preparations to defend the vampire court and city. Everyone was clearly rattled by Mia's condition and honestly so was I. Rayne was still under the illusion that he was single handedly going to fight off this rebel army of Hell and kill Gwendolyn's evil spawn. I knew Rayne was a capable warrior but ultimately this was not his fight. This was my fight and I needed to prepare the only problem was Rayne.

"Why are you reading that book?" Rayne's voice was flat and deathly serious.

I looked up from my black magic book and saw Rayne's grave expression. I wanted to prepare to fight but Rayne was seriously against it. Groaning I replied,

"You know why."

"I thought we agreed you are going to keep out of this fight. Your Grandmother sent me to protect you and that is what I am going to do."

"But your name is not on the prophecy." I snapped.

"Skyler you are a nature witch," Rayne said struggling with the right terms, "Black magic does not suit you. Stick with your herbs and chants."

Rayne snapped his fingers and the book disappeared. I would have started an argument if I hadn't already learned that I could read as much as I wanted in the magic store I worked in. Greg had closed the store for the past few days so we could work in 'secret'. Bea and I worked on talismans and charms while Greg scoured through the grimoires, (spellbooks), for

useful information about demons. Kai on the other hand took a back seat and skulked about in his special reading room. My brother Matt and his friend Dalton took Rayne's side. They had become his secret spies watching my every move. In their mind it was them and Rayne who were going to save me and the rest of the world from Gwendolyn. As I sat with Bea carving a talisman I had a text message from Stephanie.

'Feeling quite sick today, no change on the Mia front- have you heard anything from Aidan?' she asked.

I rolled my eyes, "Stephanie is asking about Aidan." I said to Bea.

"I thought she was all into this Italian guy?"

"That's what I thought."

"Aidan and his pack cleared off, last I heard he had married his cousin or something." Bea said.

Aidan had married his cousin Nadia right on the rebound. I wondered how Stephanie would take the news. I sent her text and waited for a reply. There was nothing.

"I wonder how she took it." I said.

Kai appeared from the back room and came and sat with us. Bea threw him a piece of wood,

"Make yourself useful elf." She said handing him a carving knife.

Kai picked up the knife and effortlessly carved an elabourate charm made of rowan wood. Bea who was struggling with her own carving glanced up from her work to see Kai's finished work. Irratated by his nimbleness Bea threw another lump of wood at him.

"Keep going." She snapped.

I looked at the clock and realized Rayne would be starting his shift at Wendell's right now. Heaving a sigh of relief I put down my work and decided to take a break. I left Bea and Kai and went to see Greg who was sifting through the pages of a black leather book.

"This is real human skin." He said stroking the leather.

"Okay, that's gross." I replied.

"Any news on Mia." He asked.

"Stephanie sent a text saying there is no change. She is still the same. I just wish we knew what Mia saw that scared her so much."

"Whatever she saw, scared her shitless." Greg said grimly.

"Yeah, that makes me nervous." I admitted.

"Judging by the descriptions of some of the demons in this book you should be scared. I've been thinking maybe Rayne is right-"

"Greg, not you too! I have to do this. This is my task-"

"But some of the demons in here are really frightening."

"I know and that's why I'm going to use these talismans to ward them off." I said showing him my latest handiwork.

Greg did not look impressed by my little charm.

"I really think you should reconsider."

"Look, the prophecy says that this is my path not Rayne's."

"How do you know?"

"Because an oracle predicted it. Mia predicted it."

"What if they were wrong?"

"Do you think I should ask for a second opinion?" I said sarcastically.

"Yes I do." Greg said and then looked at Kai who I completely forgot was a fortune teller himself.

Stephanie POV

The castle was filled with a subdued silence over the last few days. Mia lay in a comatose state occasionally waking up to talk some gibberish about blood. Luc remained at her side twenty four seven slowly falling to pieces. The vampires talked quietly amongst themselves debating whether to remain in the castle or flee from the oncoming apocalyptic nightmare. My baby's future was looking bleak. Giacomo wanted to take me away, he came to my room nearly every day and spoke of marriage and

family. I honestly didn't want to hear about it I needed a break from men or they needed a break from me. Plus I had grown so big and unattractive I practically waddle everywhere. Rayne dropped by every so often to check on me and Mia. Bea, Greg and Kai called too. I missed all of them.

Queen Sophie remained a steady rock for her people. Skyler rarely called me. She was always preoccupied with work and other things. I guess it was tough going for the saviour of mankind. Rayne was determined to fight the fight for Skyler like Casper wanted to fight for Sophie, but both Skyler and Sophie realized that this was their fight and no one else's.

Sophie and I often walked through the gardens together in the evening. We would talk about life when we were regular high school girls. I told Sophie about how I was bullied to the point of suicide and how I lost all my hair. In few days it will be the school prom and the thought of those girls who bullied me haunted my mind. I knew they would be going to the prom in their expensive gowns and having a

wonderful time and that really hurt me. I wish I had the opportunity to go to my prom in a knock out dress and show those bitches that they did not destroy me- but circumstances prevented me. Sophie was sympathetic and said that she would make sure I went to my summer prom- she even said she would let me borrow on of her tiara.

Tonight Sophie and I went on our usual walk. Nico, Sophie's bodyguard, was walking with us for a change, which was rare. Nico usual floated about the castle like a ninja ducking in and out of the shadows spying on us.

"Why are you following us tonight?" I asked Nico.

He was walking several steps behind us as we strolled/waddled through the garden.

"The King's orders." Nico replied.

Sophie lowered her voice, "Mia said something in one of her lucid moments that has concerned him."

"What?" I asked.

Sophie shrugged her arms, "He would not tell me."

"What do you think she said?"

"Probably something about Gwendolyn's baby being born soon." Sophie said.

Gwendolyn was a demon hybrid whose offspring would end the age of man, she was married to Sophie's father and killed Sophie's mother. She also killed Skyler Grandma using a wolfstrap- I was partly to blame for that. Aidan had asked Skyler to dispose of an enchanted item called a wolfstrap which was like a leather bracelet that turned the wearer into a werewolf. Skyler was going to dispose of it when she found me nearly dead in the forest. In the chaos she dropped the strap and forgot about it. Gwendolyn found it and used it to kill Skyler's Grandmother. So we all wanted Gwen and her spawn dead.

"Crap," I said, "What will happen when Gwendolyn does give birth?"

"The war starts. She already has a rebel army in Hell just waiting for the moment to give birth. Once the baby is born then the army will march forward then that's it."

My cell phone suddenly chimed and I received a reply from Skyler,

'Aidan married his cousin Nadia-' I didn't read any more. Suddenly the sickness I felt earlier worsened ten-fold. This shouldn't be happening I didn't love Aidan, so why was I reacting in this way. Sophie grabbed my hand and offered me some support. Nico quickly rushed to my side and lifted me off my feet.

"Are you alright?" He asked.

"I smell...bleach." Sophie suddenly blurted out then pointed at my clothes.

They were wet.

"Oh shit." I said, my waters had broke.

note from angeltwist

sorry about the massive gap, I've had a hectic last month which has made updating really difficult!!

Chapter 55

dark black magic: chapter 47- mandrake

*This was supposed to be twice as long but some how six pages of text escaped on my computer and it's whereabouts is unknown. So this chapter is shorter than I intended!! Sorry peeps! Make sure you check out my new story Bite! Remember I'm a tart for messages good or bad so be sure to leave me some love in the comments below!! >.

Sophie POV

For the past four hours I had stood outside the hospital wing listening to Stephanie screaming in agony. The doctor said Stephanie hadn't been due for weeks and he was absolutely astounded when Nico

carried Stephanie into the hospital wing. Stephanie then ordered me and Nico out of the room. Having a baby was not exactly an experience when one can maintain their dignity. So Nico and I had sat on the floor waiting for the odd nurse to run out and give us an update. At first the labour was progressing well but the last few times the nurse had popped out she seemed rattled and the very last time the nurse came out she was covered in blood. In fact as Nico and I sat there on the cold stone floor listening to Stephanie's cries of pain the scent of blood became stronger and stronger. Nico and I exchanged worried looks- Stephanie was losing a lot of blood. Luckily she was not a human but even immortals needed some blood in their system to survive.

All the commotion must have spread through the castle because Casper suddenly appeared walking down the corridor. Nico immediately shuffled a foot away from me just in case the green eyed monster that existed in Casper reared its ugly head. Getting up I walked towards him. Already I could see an expression of annoyance on his face. In low whisper he snapped,

"Why were you not in bed when I woke up?"

"Because you wake up five hours later than the normal vampire." I replied waspishly.

"I wanted a lazy evening in bed with you." He whined.

"Sorry baby but someone has to run Kingdom."

He groaned and then asked,

"How long has Stephanie been in labour for?"

"A few hours."

"Is she okay?"

"She's giving birth Casper! She is in a lot of pain."

"Shouldn't you be in there with her, holding her hand or something?"

"She won't have anybody in the room except the medical staff."

"Oh." Casper replied clearly out of his comfort zone with all the girly biological yucky stuff. Quickly he changed topic and looked down the corridor,

"Mia is down there. Luc hasn't left her side since incident a few days ago. I worry about my little niece and nephew. They keep asking where Mommy and Daddy are-"

Suddenly the door flew open and a nurse covered in blood stepped out, "Your majesties," she curtseyed, "The birth is extremely abnormal and the mother is in tremendous pain. We may be faced with the choice of saving either the baby or the mother."

We were walking together in the garden a few hours ago, everything was fine, Stephanie was fine. How did this happen? I felt Casper steady arm around my waist as I staggered back. The nurse looked very grave and asked,

"Who should we save if we come to that point?"

All of us fell silent. My eyes started to burn with tears I turned and buried my face into Casper's shoulder. I can't make this decision. I don't want to. I heard Casper say to the nurse,

"Can we have a few minutes alone first?"

The door banged shut a moment later and I felt Casper press a light kiss against the top of my head. It was like he was apologizing for the horrible choice I had to make. I knew I had to make it because Nico and Casper wouldn't make it. I didn't want to kill Stephanie but nor did I want to explain to Stephanie that it was me who killed her child. Most mothers would gladly sacrifice themselves for their babies. A horrible image of a pale face sunken eyed Stephanie sat by an empty cradle floated through my mind. Oh god. I had do something. I had to make a decision. There had to be another way and the only person I could think of asking was Mia.

I pulled myself out of Casper's grasp and without a word of explanation ran down the corridor to Mia's room. I did not even knock when I opened the small dark dingy room where Mia lay in a comatose state. Luc's head snapped around and I saw the hours of worry and sorrow etched upon his face. He saw sat at Mia's bedside holding her hand praying to the great unknown for her health.

"Sorry Luc," I said walking over to Mia's bedside and taking her freehand. Leaning to her ear I spoke loudly, "Mia, Stephanie is in trouble and I need your help."

Luc reacted badly to my question. Standing up he towered over me, "Are you out of your goddamn mind!" He yelled.

"Stephanie and her baby are dying Luc, I need Mia's help."

"She's a very sick woman," Luc grabbed my hand pried it off of Mia's hand. "Get out."

"Luc, Stephanie will die."

"I don't care. Nothing matters anymore. Not without her. Please get out Sophie."

"I'm not leaving." I said bluntly.

Luc lost his temper. He placed his hands on my shoulder to physically throw me out of the room. Big mistake. Whispering an apology I did what I had once done to Rudolph when he had kissed me for the first time. My hands splayed across Luc's chest and I

gave him a shove that sent him flying into the opposite stone wall. The wall cracked as Luc's body impacted against it. Nico and Casper appeared in the door way looking bemused at Luc. Even Luc looked staggered. He rose to his feet and then lunged at me, but was knocked off side by Casper who had tackled him to the floor.

"Keep him busy!" I yelled at Casper as he began to fight with his brother.

I grabbed Mia's hand again and spoke slowly and clearly.

"Mia, I need your help. Stephanie and her baby are in danger and I don't know what to do." I said.

Mia lay completely unresponsive her eyes stared straight up at the ceiling.

"Mia," I tried again, "Please help me save Stephanie, tell me what to do. I don't know. Please Mia. Break through the surface, please."

Mia blinked once and for a second her eyes flickered.

"Mia come on, help me, help me, please Mia, please." I asked.

Mia lips parted and she whispered, "Mandrake root."

Everyone stopped. Luc and Casper stopped fighting and everyone turned to Mia.

"What do I do? Should she eat?" I asked

"Make her hold it." She whispered croakly.

"Thank you Mia." I said moving away from her but as I did so Mia hand snatched at my wrist.

"I am not Mia," she said. I stared at her in utter dumbfoundment, "I am Skyler's Grandmother. Mia is safe with me for the time being."

Mia's eyes rolled back in to her head and she was gone. Luc ran to Mia's bedside and grabbed her hand and began to speak softly and incoherently to her. Nico, Casper and I backed out the door and ran back up the corridor.

"Where the hell are we going to get a mandrake root from at such short notice?" Casper asked.

"The several hundreds of acres of garden that you own your majesty." Nico replied sarcastically.

"Well I don't know what the damn thing looks like it!" Casper snapped.

"Stay with Stephanie, I'll grab one from the gardens. I'll be a few minutes." Nico said.

*Skyler POV

Kai sat at a circle table with his tarot cards and crystal ball. Greg, Bea and I sat opposite him entranced by his little warm up routine where he grounded himself and opened up his psychic senses. Kai had already warned me, he was not an oracle. You see an oracle has vivid detailed clear visions while Kai's vision was a little more fuzzy. I didn't care. I needed advice. All of watched in anticipation as Kai said a little prayer and then turned out the main lights. A small dim glow from behind him darkly illuminated the room and Kai leaned forward and stared into the crystal ball. This was called scrying- the process of looking in to a reflective surface and seeing images unfolding.

"I can see Rayne running away from a terrible stench," Kai said deathly serious.

Bea and I looked at each other and our faces cracked up.

"One more laugh and I'm not doing this!" Kai snapped.

Face forward we tried not to laugh or even look at each other. Kai leaned over the ball and peered into the depths of the crystal ball. He waved his hands around in a mysteriously motion,

"What I am doing here today is the ancient art of scrying," he explained softly. "I am using this crystal ball as a vessel to see in to the future. First things first, lay my palm with twenty dollars."

"Are you kidding! I'm the flipping saviour of mankind!" I snapped.

"And his dad," Kai nodded at Greg, "Is the meanest tight fisted landlord in this town."

"Greg can take it out of my earnings today." I sighed.

"Perhaps paying for it might make you take it more seriously." Kai said and then continued gazing into the crystal ball.

For five minutes we all watched Kai staring into this ball, waiting in anticipation for him to say something- or anything. Occasionally he would make a slight noise 'ummm' noise and then go deathly silently again. Bea rolled her eyes and began to drum her fingers loudly on the table. Kai looked up from his ball gave her a look that could kill. Bea immediately stopped and sheepishly looked away. Kai brought his attention back to me.

"We need to keep Gwendolyn's army firmly in hell. If they are allowed to enter on to our earthly plane humans, vampire, elves, wolves and every creature are going to get slaughtered." He said.

"But's Rayne's plan is to wait until they attack." I said.

"Rayne's plan is to keep you safe. He couldn't care less about us or the rest of humanity. Fighting on this plane of existence would be a lot easier than fighting in Hell. Anybody who is killed in the cross fire is collateral damage as far as Rayne's concerned."

"This is not good news."

"Oh, it gets better. If you want to defeat Gwendolyn, you have to go into the belly of the beast- straight into hell and have a stand up fight."

"Are you serious- I can't go into Hell!"

"Demigod- daughter of Death, you can go and so can we."

"You would come with me?"

"I'd rather have the humans destroying the planet than the demons." Kai said.

"Rayne is never going to let me fight."

"Why not go into the Hell kick some demon ass and before Rayne get the opportunity to wrap you up in cotton and lock you in tower?"

"I guess we could give it a go. Matthias would know how to get us into Hell and I already have an alley in a vampire called Jacques. He would aid us."

"I can call on my fairy friends for help," Bea chipped in, "They're not mad on humans but they would

definitely prefer humans trashing the planet then vampires."

"I wonder if Aidan would fight for us?" Greg said.

"No way- Aidan and his pack of mongrels can keep out of this."

"So how are we going to get Rayne out the way?"

"I'll think of something." I said.

*Sophie POV

Nico rushed back with a mandrake root. It was the weirdest looking root I'd ever seen in the world. It looked like one of those comedy vegetables that grows in a weird way so it looks like person. The mandrake root looked like a baby. We banged on the hospital door and told the nurse to place it next to Stephanie. The nurse scurried back in and we heard Stephanie yelling,

"Is that supposed to help me!?"

Nico, Casper and I all exchanged nervous looks. Now only time would tell. Sitting down on the floor I snuggled in Casper's side, he put his arm around me

and lightly kissed my head. I wish I could give Stephanie and her baby the healing power that I possessed to save them. Casper gently stroked my hair and began to talk casually to take my mind off the grave situation,

"Blood and Sally came back from Lourdes yesterday night. Blood wanted to see you but I said you were busy." Casper said.

Blood was my foster dad and Sally is my aunt. It's a complicated story but real my real father was a vampire nobleman who was married to Gwendolyn. He did not love Gwendolyn and fell in love with my human mother and had me. When my father said he was going to divorce Gwendolyn, Gwendolyn killed him. She then tracked down my mother and then poisoned her mind. My mother became anorexic and died of starvation when I was just a kid. I never knew about my vampire heritage. My only living relative was my Aunt Sally who had sealed herself away inside a house after having an argument with her boyfriend- my future adoptive parent Blood. When Blood was a young man he was madly in love with

Sally but consider her too lowly to marry her. His solution was to secretly date her in private then ignore her in public. Sally soon tired off this and one night decided to run away. Blood caught her and in a fit of passion decided to imprison her in a cottage in the court grounds. But his plan back fired when Sally used her magic to stop him from entering the house. They didn't speak to each other for well over a decade. Sally was locked in the cottage and Blood was locked out. Anyway I kinda of reunited them after all these years and they are a really sweet couple. Blood isn't such a jerk as he used to be.

"Oh god!" A voice yelled loudly. I looked up and saw Rayne putting his hand over his nose.

Casper automatically bristled, he hated Rayne. Giving Rayne a scathing look Casper snorted, "What's matter demon."

I jabbed Casper in the side with my elbow and gave him an evil glare. Rayne glanced Casper up and down and ignored him. I hated all this male posturing.

Rayne inhaled the air and then struggled to breathe, "I can smell mandrake." He said.

"Mandrake has no smell, moron." Casper snapped.

"It does to demons! The smell is like rancid fish and putrefying cabbage it wreaks," Rayne gasped and then suddenly turned on Casper, "Did you do this vampire? Did you think this might be a funny stunt to pull?"

Casper leapt up and strode towards Rayne looking for a fight. Immediately I stepped in between Rayne and Casper, "Cut it out both of you!" I snapped.

Casper stupidly said, "I could take him on."

Rayne laughed, "Come on then."

The sound of Stephanie screaming silenced both of them. Rayne looked anxiously at the door,

"What is going in there?" he asked.

"She's giving birth." I said bluntly.

"But she wasn't due yet." Rayne said turning pale.

"The pregnancy accelerated and no one knows why." I explained.

"Why did you put the mandrake root in her room?" Rayne asked.

"Stephanie and the baby were dying so I asked Mia what to do in desperation. I kept asking her until she eventually spoke. But when she spoke it turned out to be Skyler's grandmother communicating through Mia's body. She was the one who told us about the mandrake."

"Mandrake is used to ward off demons. I can't go into that room because the smell is so offensive. It sounds like a demon is to blame for Stephanie's advanced pregnancy. Gwendolyn is targeting Stephanie and her child but why? Neither of them is in the prophecies. So why would she attack them. It makes no sense."

"She must be important because Skyler's Grandma saved her."

"Death would have not allowed her to do that very easily." Rayne said.

Suddenly our conversation was override by the unexpected noise of a baby's cry. The nurse ran out smiling and said,

"It worked. Stephanie has a baby girl. Both are doing well."

Nico, Casper and I followed the nurse towards the door but heard Stephanie yell,

"Don't you dare come in here- I look a complete mess."

The nurse rolled her eyes and we all waited outside. A few moments later the nurse brought out a tiny baby wrapped up carefully in white blankets. The nurse handed the baby to me and nervously I looked down at this tiny beautiful creature. She looked up at me and blinked, her eyes were deep vivid blue just like her father's, Rudolph, but she had her mother's hair and pretty bow mouth. I melted and looked up at Casper and said,

"I want one."

Casper went pale and mumbled something incoherent.

I noticed Rayne leaning over me smiling at the baby. My heart melted that was the first time I had ever seen Rayne actually genuinely smile. The tiny baby yawned sleepily and Casper softly said,

"We'll make her a princess."

"Has Stephanie decided on a name?" I asked.

"Dahlia, after her mother's favourite flower."

"Princess Dahlia, very pretty." I smiled.

Chapter 56

dark black magic- chapter 48- jail break

Miserably we all sat staring at each other in the dark dank cell of the vampire castle. I knew I had a cell phone stuffed in my bra but there wasn't exactly anyone I could call for help. Helpless I sat next to Greg on the crude wooden bench wondering how many people would suffer at my hands. Rayne would wait for the demon army to cross the threshold into earth before attacking. I wanted to attack the army in Hell and stop them from coming to Earth- but Rayne thought that was too high risk and so did Casper the King of the vampires. Their solution was to catch Sophie and I plus our allies and lock us up until the danger had passed over.

Sophie threw her full weight against the door and bounced back. Bea sighed irratible-

"You're wasting your time. It's magic. The door will only open from the outside."

"I know," groaned Sophie, "But I have to do something. I can't-" the words caught in her throat but I knew what she was going to say. She couldn't idly sit about while the whole world was going to Hell. Sophie blinked away the tears in her eyes and then paced over to the wall and began pounding her fists against the wall.

"Those walls are a foot thick." Greg sighed.

Sophie was not put off by Greg's comment, she continued to pound against the rough rock until her hands were bloodied. Kai and Greg pulled Sophie back from the wall.

"Are you crazy?" Kai asked tearing a piece of his shirt off and wrapping it around Sophie's wrists. Sophie tore off the bandages,

"I heal almost instantanly." She said throwing her self back at the wall. Kai stopped her again grabbing her shoulders and shaking her,

"Sophie for god sake it's pointless. You are not going to damage this wall."

There was a flicker in Sophie's eyes like she had finally registered how futile her actions were. She opened her mouth to reply but her breathe caught in her throat and Sophie broke down into tears as the hopelessness of our situation sank in. Even though Sophie was Queen the guards would refuse to obey her orders having been threatened with the death sentence by the king for so much as wandering near our cell.

Before Rayne had caught me off guard Stephanie had sent me a peculiar text instructing me to conceal my cellphone in my bra. I hadn't forgotten about the cell phone but what use was a cell phone if there was no one to call. Everybody I knew was here sat in this room. I suppose I could call the police but I doubt they would take me seriously when I stated my address as the imperial vampire court. But then the

phone must have some significance- why did Stephanie text me a few moments before Rayne had arrived?

Pulling out the cell phone I flicked through the address book. My heart leapt for joy- of course how could I have been so dumb. Jacques! I could call Jacques. I called his number and almost wept when Jacques picked up the phone.

"Hey gorgeous." He chirped happily.

"Oh god Jacques you have no idea how glad I am to hear your voice."

"I have the effect on women." He said.

"No- you don't understand. I need you to bust us out of the dungeon beneath the court."

"Are you serious?"

"This is your great quest that Mia was talking about."

"Yeah, well the vampire people kinda of have a warrant out for my arrest plus I know the dungeon guard- or rather his wife."

"If you don't do this then an army from Hell is coming straight to earth."

"Well when you put it like that." Jacques sighed.

"Thanks." I said gratefully.

I explained the situation to the others whose spirits were revived by the news of rescue by Jacques. The only exception to this was Sophie who obviously was lacking confidence when it came to Jacques.

"He's a nice guy, but Jacques is a bit of a screw up." Sophie sighed.

I honestly didn't care as long as he came and opened that door. Suddenly there was loud scraping noise like someone was being dragged across the stone floor. A shrill feminine voice rang through the air loudly yelling,

"Francois, you have fouled up my entrance again! This is not the flat I was assigned to decorate."

The voice was familiar but I couldn't place it. I listened to the pathetic whimpers of a man.

"Stop muttering Francois and open this door. I need to speak to the young lady."

As if by some miracle the door opened revealing a fat woman and a tiny scrap of a man. I recognised them instantly as Piggy the interior designer and her long suffering assistant Franscois that had once given Rayne and I a consultation about our own flat. Piggy angrily pointed an accusing finger at me.

"You!" she spat- Francois covered his ears- "How dare you and your demon reject my services. No one has ever shunned the artist wonder which is my gift for interior design." Piggy grabbed Francois by the neck and shook him yelling, "Explain to this wretched girl what your demon did!"

Francois who was half the size of Piggy dangled like a doll in her large grasp. His legs scrapped along the ground as he explained,

"The demon cloaked your presence from us."

This didn't surprise me. Piggy had made some romantic suggestions to Rayne which had absolutely terrified him. Piggy hurled Francois into our jail cell,

Greg had to quickly leap out the way before being hit. Piggy then slammed the jail door shut and stared at us through the bar window. Immeadiatly I ran over to the door and demanded to be let out but Piggy shook her head furiously. So I then explained what was happening with the demonic army ect but Piggy still seemed really angry about the interior design job she was supposed to do on our apartment. Composing herself Piggy took a deep calming breathe,

"You are lucky. Piggy will forgive you if you let Piggy spend one night with your gorgeous demon to whip some manners into him," The expression on Piggy's face made feel nauseous her eyes were glazed over like she was imagining some wicked fantasy of her and Rayne.

"Otherwise Piggy will leave you in the jail cell to rot."

I could feel the color draining from my face. Piggy was serious. She would not let us out until I agreed to let her have her way with Rayne. Sophie touched my shoulder gently and whispered,

"You don't have to, Jacques is coming for us."

But what if Jacques didn't come? What if this was only opportunity I got to escape. My mid flittered between the options of saving the world or letting Rayne get molested. Rayne was a demon and he could handle himself. I'm sure if we all survived this apocalypse he could survive one night of spurning Piggy's advances. Clenching my teeth I said,

"If I agreed you would have to swear not to touch him. You can look but don't touch."

Piggy looked disappointed but then shrugged,

"I have some very cute outfits that Francois use to wear before he let himself go. I suppose I could provide myself with a visual spectacular."

"No nudity though." I snapped.

Piggy nodded her head and opened the cell door. I felt like I had made a deal with the devil. Piggy grabbed Francois and smiled, "I will be back tomorrow to claim my reward. Try not to get killed darlings."

She flounced off back along the corridor. Greg and Kai had appalled looked on their faces. They were

probably imagining what horrors Piggy had install for Rayne. We couldn't hang about. Led by Sophie we crept along the corridors out of the castle. Just as we entered the grounds we bumped into Jacques who was stealthily moving about some bushes.

"I thought you needed my help?" He asked.

"We did but then something bizarre happened." I replied then explaining about Piggy and the bargain. Jacques too looked pale towards the end of my tale.

"I know Piggy, she once cornered me in a party. Now I'm not picky but there was no way I was going to touch her with a barge pole." Jacques said.

"I feel awful about it but we had too. We need to stop the army." I replied.

"Great, well did you ever stop and think about how you are going to get in to Hell?" Jacques asked.

Then suddenly a voice came out from the darkness of the trees,

"I can help." Loki stepped out the forest line into the moonlight.

Chapter 57

Dark Black Magic- chapter 49- Death's Palace

What was in it for Loki? Why was he here? All of us had frozen still to the spot. I thought Rayne had killed Loki but then I remember what Rayne had said. A demon is immortal and cannot be killed. If a demon's physical manifestation is slayed on earth then its spirit returns back to Hell.

"I saw Rayne hovering around the gateway to Hell waiting for that rowdy crowd of rebels to come sauntering into this charming dimension." Loki said casually.

"So why are you so keen to offer your assistance?"

It seemed strange but Loki hesitated like he was doing a bit of quick thinking before confessing frankly, “If the army marches through and takes over the world then there would no need of a Hell. Therefore there would be no need of a Prince of Hell. I would lose all my power. Could you imagine how inconvenient that would be?” Loki purred.

The man was clearly a selfish megalomaniac so his story did seem plausible but I knew Loki was slippery as an eel. Sophie moved to my side sensing my hesitation, Loki eyed her up and down cautiously. Sophie was not only the Queen of the vampires but also the most powerful vampire in existence. She had travelled to the plains of Hell once before to fight Gwendolyn and had killed a demon. Loki was clearly nervous of Sophie’s presence.

“So how do we get into to Hell?” I asked.

“Demon’s use portals into and out of Hell. We can use these very portals but I feel that some preparation is required before we charge in and get ourselves slaughtered.”

Bea stepped forward at this point and said, “We have supplies back at the store. We had been making them before Rayne captured us.”

“Yes,” Loki said scratching his chin, “We should get those supplies and quick. Rayne cannot fulfil the prophecy.”

Loki shimmered us from the forest into the store. Turning to me Loki said,

“While they sort out their supplies we need to go on a very special trip to sort out your special supplies.”

Before I could even blink Loki had grabbed my hand and the familiar surroundings of the store faded into blackness and it’s place appeared a dark corridor carved out of the blackest marble I had ever seen. Pulling away from Loki and stared around the place wondering if I had been tricked but Loki pointed at the walls and carefully I stepped closer and saw the carvings in the walls. Dark intricate carvings depicting scenes of masscres, graveyards, people dying and even the grim reaper himself decorated the black marble walls. I felt myself shiver in fear.

“Welcome home.” Loki smiled.

A dark hooded figure swooped past and landed in front of us their huge black feathered wings folded down behind their back. Nervously I stepped back but the figure ventured forward bowing respectfully at me.

“Most honoured Princess, your father extends his fondest wishes to you on your triumphant arrival home. Please follow me and I will lead him to you. Your demon escort is welcomed to wait here.” The figure croaked in an unearthly voice.

I glanced back at Loki who shrugged, “I can’t come with you. God’s will not welcome demons into their throne room.”

Taking a deep breathe I followed the figure along the corridor into a massive domed empty throne room. The figure asked me to wait and left me alone. It was kinda of weird sat here waiting to meet your parents for the first time. I had always thought my mother was some hussy and my father was some careless one night stand in a diner. But then my life was far from conventional, my boyfriend was a demon and

all my friends were some mythical kind of creature. There was a sudden noise behind me that made me jump. I turned and saw a kid no more than thirteen or fourteen staring back at me. I felt silly for being frightened and apologetically said to the kid,

“Sorry you scared the living day lights out of me.” I said.

“I thought you would be more like your mother.” He said bluntly.

I blinked and replied, “Um, who are you?”

“Your father.”

I couldn’t help but laugh. This kid was way too young. Smiling softly I patted his head,

“I think I’m a little too old to be your daughter.”

This seemed to irritate the boy who then walked past me and sat on the throne.

“I am your father.”

“That’s so cute. But where are your mom and dad? Are you lost.”

The boy suddenly jumped up and before my eyes changed into a young man in his early thirties. Irratible he called out,

“See, I told you it wouldn’t work!”

Footsteps pitter-pattered behind me and I turned to see my mother walking behind me with her hands on her hips.

“Sorry Skyler,” she apologised to me, “I thought if he appeared a little younger he would not be so intimidating.”

“I’m not intimidating.” My father said lazily.

“Well, dear, she has just walked down the mourners corridor and those carvings are hardly welcoming. I wish you would let me wallpaper them over.”

“This is Death’s palace, not some designer show home! I allowed you to put cream carpet in the bedroom but that is as far as it goes.” He snapped.

“Give me another century and you won’t recognise this place.” My mother said in a low voice too me.

“I heard that!” My father snapped.

I couldn’t help but feeling a little mixed up and confused. For so many years I had thought my parents had abandoned me so part of me wanted to be really angry at them but the other part wanted really wanted to be reconciled with them. My mother reached out her arms to embrace me but I found myself stepping away from her. She was my biological mother but she was not my mom. She hadn’t been there for me like my Grandmother so I found it hard to accept her back into my life. Pain flickered across my mother’s eyes, her arms dropped to her side and she nodded quietly in acceptance,

“I understand. I would be mad too.” She said.

“Why did you never explain to me that I had parents or I had a brother? You could have visited us! Grandma really missed you.” I said feeling all these suppressed angry emotions I had felt for so long bubbling to the surface.

My father rose to my mother’s side and held her,

“Do not blame her, this is my fault. I forced her to stay with me and I forced her to give you up.” He said.

“Why?” I cried.

“I had read that there would come a time when the age of men would be threatened and that only my daughter could save them. I thought this was nonsense until you came along and then I realised that I had to give you up because the world would need you one day. This was not an easy choice. Your mother did not speak to me for a year.” He explained.

I fell silent unsure of how to feel. I couldn’t understand why it was me. What was so special about me? My father pulled out of thin air a small black leather book.

“This is why you came. Here is your birth right.” He said handing me the book.

I opened the first page and read the title, ‘Death’s Grimoire’. A grimoire was a textbook of magic which could be either constructive magic, destructive magic or even both. You see there is no such thing as black or white magic. Destruction and creation are two sides of the same coin. Flicking through the pages I read the spells all hand written carefully in English.

There were spells for storms, barriers, light, water, growth and many more.

“Use it wisely.” My father said.

The room suddenly melted away and I found myself back in the confines of the store. Bea, Greg, Sophie, Jacques, and Kai were all waiting patiently for me having gathered their supplies.

“Are you okay?” Asked Bea.

I nodded and told them where I had been. Honestly Bea, Greg and Kai were more of a family to me then my parents. Bea hugged me and said,

“After all this we can watch man-eating bear movies and stuff our faces full of ice cream.”

Loki suddenly appeared out of nowhere, “It’s time to go.” He said.

Chapter 58

dark black magic- the ending!!!

Rayne POV

The gate was sealed but the rebel army was pounding the gates and walls trying to break through. Matthias and Dalton battled to keep the gate shut while I sneaked through and followed the cries of a newborn baby coming from the inside of a tumbled down castle…

Sklyer POV

Loki opened the portal and we heard the thousand angry cries of angry demons trying to break their way into our world.

“Beyond the gate is one of the few permanent portals into our world. These lowly demons do not possess the power or skill to manifest their own portals. They need to break through the gate to gain access into your world.” Loki said nonchalantly.

All of us with great hesitation stepped through Loki’s portal into the realm of Hell. There was no fire or unbearable heat. Instead it was cool lifeless sort of wasteland with a great wall that ran around it with a giant black gate that I could see was being defended by Matthias and Dalton.

“The rest is up to you now,” Loki said sealing his portal shut, “I’d help but I don’t really have anything worth dying for. Good luck.” He disappeared leaving us completely alone.

Sophie hesistated as she suddenly spotted Casper swinging a sword at a demon twice his height. In a blur of speed I watch her move to where Casper stood, seize Casper’s sword and chop off the demon’s head in one swoop. Casper looked at her in amazement.

We all ran to the gate and heard Casper yelling at Sophie. Matthias and Dalton were overwhelmed with demons, Bea immediately rushed to their aid and lobbed a couple of mandrake roots into the crowd of demons. Quickly they retreated covering their noses gasping for air. Dalton and Matthias stopped and stared at Bea who was continuing to pelt mandrake roots into the crowd.

“It’s like a demon stink bomb.” Bea explained to the boys.

Mean while Casper was busy yelling at Sophie when he noticed Jacques, “YOU!” he yelled at Jacques. Jacques had been Casper’s best friend but Jacques had done something extremely naughty. He had ran off with a vampire named Christy who happened to be under Casper’s protection. Since then there had been a warrant for Jacques arrest.

“Don’t say it like that,” Jacques whined, “I know you missed me.”

“I’m going to have you thrown in the dungeons after this!” Casper roared.

Jacques grabbed my arm, “Okay I think it’s time for us to go.” He hissed in my ear.

“Jacques, come back here!” Casper yelled.

“Be a good vampire King and defend the fort for me cupcake.” Jacques called back grabbing my arm and dragging me away from the fight. We left the rest of them to defend the gate and ran long the wall of hell.

“So how are we going to slip past the thousands of soldiers.” He asked me.

“No idea but give me a few minutes.” I said thinking.

“How about this.” Jacques said lifting me off my feet and effortlessly jumping on to the top of the high wall. He ran fast along the wall until we had past the army and then jumped down.

“I like your thinking.” I said as we made our way to the castle in the distance.

The castle was completely unguarded and we could hear a baby crying from within. Looking at Jacques I shrugged,

“Guess we follow the sound of the baby cries.”

We entered the castle and found it derelict and abandoned. Gwendolyn had left herself completely opened for attack. The noise of the baby seemed to radiate above us so we followed the baby's cries up the stairs. Jacques stayed very close to me through out. I kept thinking this should be Rayne next to me, not Jacques. Passing through dilapidated halls and grand rooms we came to the entrance of one tower.

"I guess this is it." I said staring up the staircase.

Jacques didn't reply he was across the room examining something else..

"I wondered why Gwendolyn left herself so open." I said.

There was a low growl and I spun around. Walking towards me was the monster from dreams, the same monster that had attacked me before. The cosodirake.

Jacques POV

The giant mutated chicken will killer claws bristled its mane as it stalked towards Skyler. I pinched the bridge of my nose wondering what the hell to do.

Skyler was a demigod, she could handle this I thought but when I saw the look of terror and panic in her eyes I knew she could not do this. Crap. What choice did I have. As it walked towards Skyler and raised its lethal looking claw I came up behind it and saw amongst its great rear plumage a magnificent feather. Using all the strength I possessed I grabbed the demonic chicken's ass feather and pulled it out. The creature roared in pain whirling around to slice the air where I had been standing seconds ago. Skyler looked stunned, but feigning confidence I smiled,

"I'll teach this over grown farm animal whose boss! Come to Daddy chicky!" I said blindly leaping on its back and riding it like a bull at a rodeo. Skyler used the opportunity to ran up the stairs out of sight leaving me alone with the killer hen. I had no idea how I was going to kill it. The only weapons I possessed were my own two hands. The demon bucked around as I held on for precious life. There were so many things I wanted to do before I died. The chicken threw me off and I rolled across the floor and on to my feet. I couldn't give up just yet.

“Okay,” I said out loud to it, “I’m just going to work on the hunch that if I cut off your head, you’ll die. All I need now is an axe or a sword. A chainsaw would be nice.”

The chicken demon lunged at me and I side stepped out of the way. At least I was nimble on my feet one small mercy for being a dancer. The chicken lunged at me again and I spiralled to the side. The chicken roared in anger and stalked slowly towards me like a cat about to pounce. I looked behind me an noticed I was standing behind the window- great the old Hollywood trick, trick the beastie into jumping out of the window. I stood in front of the window and watched it charge at the last minute I side stepped out the way. The chicken roared and I stepped out the way. Glass shattered and there was a loud heavy thud a few seconds later as the chicken fell to its death.

Skyler POV

I ascended the tower and opened the door. Gwendolyn was stood dressed in black leaning over crib. I could hear the soft snuffling’s of the demonic child from the basket and heard Gwendolyn proudly

cooing over her son- the one who would wipe out all of humanity. Holding the grimoire I ventured into the room. Gwendolyn made a soft sighing noise,

“So this is it- judgment day. The end of man.”

“No, I won’t let you kill millions of people.” I said.

“Witch, you came! I was expecting to see your lover.”

“The prophecy says-”

“Yes we all know what the prophecy says.” Gwendolyn replied acidicly.

“I must kill you and that monster you gave birth too.” I said.

Gwendolyn nodded,

“That’s the idea sugar, although I plan on killing you first little witch, just like I killed your grandmother.”

My breathe caught in my throat as rage slowly filled me. Gwendolyn turned to face me and looked down at the grimoire that was clutched in my hands. A smile curved across her face.

“Death’s grimoire- how charming pity you won’t understand a single word that is written in it. The language of the gods was lost long ago.”

I opened the book and found it was like reading a foreign text book. I couldn’t even understand the alphabet it was written in. Panicking I staggered back flicking through the pages trying to see if there was one spell in English. Gwendolyn sighed,

“I’ll make this quick.” She said.

I glanced up and Gwendolyn was inches away from me her hand reached out and wrapped her icy cold fingers around my neck. I dropped the grimoire and began to choke. Gwendolyn lifted me off my feet and watched me struggle for breathe. Her face twisted into a smile and she threw me suddenly against the wall. I crumpled up into a heap on the floor as pain exploded through my body. Gwendolyn stood over me laughing,

“I’m sorry, but killing you quickly would be such a waste. I want to savour each and every one of your last dying breathes.” She said grabbing my arm and throwing me to the other side of the room. White

light burst in front of my eyes as I slammed against the opposite wall. I heard Gwendolyn talking but I couldn't focus I felt myself losing conciseness.

'Skyler, I'll help you.' I heard my Grandmother's voice say.

"Grandma?" I whispered.

'Open the grimoire to the page which feels right and I'll reveal the text to you.'

"Thanks." I murmured.

Opening my eyes I pulled myself up and staggered over to the grimoire, Gwendolyn watched me with a sick expression of pleasure on her face.

"Go on sweetie, I'll give this one to you. I guess you could hit me with the book." She laughed.

I grabbed the book and opened it turning my back towards Gwendolyn. Flicking to a random page and I found the words had had changed to the English alphabet and the chant was now phonetically spelt out so I could follow it. Unfortunatly there was no English description so I had no idea what this spell

would actually do. Still I had no choice but to muttered the chant under my breathe so Gwendolyn couldn't hear and pray that it would work. As I finished the spell the air around me crackled. Gwendolyn had no idea that my spell had worked. She stood behind me mocking my inability at being a witch.

"I can't believe you wasted your talent on hedge magic," she snorted. "Making a cinnamon broom is not going to save you from my army of demons."

A wisp of smoke danced in front of me then shimmered a beautifully engraved scythe similar to the one that the grim reaper was depicted with materialized in front of me. I dropped the grimoire and grabbed it's handles. Gwendolyn behind me said,

"Have you give up already?" Her hand clutched my shoulder and spun me around and as she did I raised the scythe and slashed her.

"A scythe?" Gwendolyn asked staggering back clutching her chest.

Horrified I dropped the scythe and watched Gwendolyn double over in pain. Black blood seaped out between her fingers dripping onto the floor as she hit the wall. She was mortally wounded. Looking up at me she said,

“You couldn’t read the text, how is this possible.”

“I had a little help from my grandma.” I said dryly.

Gwendolyn shook her head in disbelief. Ignoring her I picked up the scythe and walked towards the monster in the crib. Time to end this once and for all I said raising the scythe up and peering into the cot. Immeadiatly the scythe dropped to my side. There was no monster in the cot, there was only a tiny helpless baby. The tiny baby stared up at me and its little arms wiggled and kicked out just like a normal baby.

“Are you going to kill him?” Gwendolyn croaked from across the room.

I staggered away from the crib. This wan’t me, I wasn’t a killer but I had killed her, I was responsible

for her death. The euphoria of victory was absent and I dropped the scythe and ran over to her.

“I’m sorry.” I croaked.

She looked up at me sympathetically and shrugged,

“Only one of us could live.”

But I hadn’t the conscience of a killer. I wasn’t like Rayne or Gwendolyn who could dispose of life so easily. Gwendolyn looked across the room at the crib, and mouthed, ‘my baby’. Turning my head I saw Rayne walking towards the crib, his sword drawn. He looked tired and his clothes were bloody, he entered the room so quietly I hadn’t even noticed.

“Rayne,” I said weakly, “What are you doing?”

“Ending this.” He said.

“What do you mean?” I know it was a stupid question to ask, the plan had always been to kill Gwendolyn and the baby but I couldn’t bring myself to kill an innocent child.

Rayne paused for a moment and looked back at me, he pulled out a dagger and walked toward me,

“Mortal weapons will not kill the child,” He said snatching my hand and slicing through the flesh, “But your blood will kill it.”

The cut wasn’t deep but it stung like hell, Gwendolyn grabbed my wrist and pleaded,

“Don’t let him kill my baby.”

“Rayne-” I called out after him.

Rayne made a very irrated sigh and swung round he put the dagger down and picked up his sword,

“I’m sorry Skyler.” He said walking towards me.

It was like watching him in slow motion as he raised the blade and drove it deep into Gwendolyn’s chest. She screamed and gripped my arm gasping for breath. Rayne left the sword buried in her chest and walked away. I sat on the floor covered in blood staring at the now lifeless body of Gwendolyn.

“You’re too god damn human for your own good,” Rayne said picking up the bloody dagger once again, “This baby is innocent now, but in twenty years he will come for the one who murdered his mother.

Then what? He's no oridinary baby, Skyler, he may one day become more powerful than me. I don't know if I can protect you, so that's why we have to kill it now rather than regretted in twenty years."

"Rayne we don't know that he'll turn out bad, I'm sure if we put him with a loving family-"

"He's not human. He is a demon- they don't understand the concept of love or forgiveness."

"But you do."

"Only because I have a soul mate. Before you there was nothing good in me."

Rayne stood over the crib with his dagger poised.

"Rayne I order you not to harm that child." I said.

"Skyler you once ordered me to never listen to you again- don't you remember. I understand that you are not strong enough to do this and that is why I'm doing it for you." He said.

Panic swept through me and I grabbed the grimoire and chanted the first spell I landed on. A line of fire swept in front of Rayne and the crib creating an

impassable barrier. Rayne swung round furious at my defiance. Picking up my scythe I pointed it at him.

“I will not let you kill the child.” I said.

Rayne’s eyes blackened,

“I don’t want to fight you baby, but I will if you do not stand down.”

“Rayne, there is no way in hell I’m going to let you kill an innocent life.”

“Pity.” He sighed.

He moved across the room in a blur and grabbed me from behind, he was gentle but firm and softly whispered in my ear,

“Put down the scythe.”

I chanted the fire spell again and flames burst beween us, Rayne let go and I sprinted towards the crib. A hand reached out and grabbed me throwing me to the side of the room. My scythe dropped to the floor with a loud metal thud that echoed about the room. I looked up from the floor to see Rayne pick up the bloody dagger. I tried to move but an excruciating

bolt of pain ricocheted up my arm. I screamed in pain, my arm was broken. Sucking in the pain I crawled across the floor towards my grimoire. Rayne stood over me thinking I was trying to reach for my scythe and kicked the scythe across the room,

“After this is finished I’m taking you to the hospital.” He said gently.

After this I was going to hand him over to Piggy and let him dance the light fantastic for her in the nude for breaking my arm- I thought to myself. He walked away leaving me to drag my body across the floor to the fallen book. The pain in my arm was agony as broken bones rubbed against each other. I reached out and with my good hand took the grimoire.

“This is for you Skyler like everything else I do.” I heard Rayne whisper.

I threw the book open and read the first spell I saw. Thorny briars shot up between the floor boards and caught Rayne’s wrists. The dagger dropped from his hand and landed in the crib. The briars encircled his arms and legs pinning him down. Struggling in vain he yelled at me to release him. I stood up and limped

past him to the baby's crib. The dagger had landed softly next to the child.

"Skyler you can't hold me forever. These briars will not last long." Rayne warned.

Just at that moment Jacques burst into the door. A smile lit up across my face. He had survived the sharp talons of the demon bird downstairs. Jacques beamed at me then looked up at Rayne in confusion.

"Why is Rayne tied up and why is that brat still alive." He asked.

But before I could answer Rayne said,

"Skyler's lost it, Gwendolyn cast a spell on her. She is trying to protect the baby."

"That's not true!" I yelled.

"Then kill the baby!" Rayne yelled.

"No I won't!" I said.

Jacques looked at Rayne and they both exchanged knowing glances as if I was actually enchanted. Jacques walked towards the crib and Rayne said,

“You have to cut the child with the dagger, it’s coated with Skyler’s blood and only her blood can kill it.”

“Jacques don’t listen to him, he is lying. The baby is innocent; I don’t want it to be punished for the crimes of its mother. ” I said.

Jacques now looked confused at both of us. He picked up the dagger and looked down at the baby. He hesitated.

“Kill it!” Rayne ordered.

“No don’t, please.” I begged Jacques.

Jacques looked at both of us and said,

“A long time ago Mia once warned me that this would happen,” he said quietly, “Someone will ask you to commit a terrible crime but you must listen to the girl.”

Jacques walked over to me,

“Do you have a plan?” he asked.

“Give me a few minutes and I’ll have one.” I said.

Jacques rolled his eyes,

“I can’t believe I’m doing this.” He said walking back over to the crib and lifting out the baby.

Rayne roared in anger, “What are you doing!”

“Mia is a brilliant oracle and if she says I should listen to Skyler then I will no matter how crazy it seems I will listen to her- and so should you.” Jacques replied.

Rayne began to frantically struggle against the briars.

“We need to go.” I said knowing that the thorns would not hold Rayne long. Jacques nodded but paused when he saw the way I was holding my arm.

“What happened?” he said pointing at my arm.

“Rayne and I had a little struggle earlier on.” I confessed.

Jacques put the baby down and then went back to the crib and took a blanket out, he then walked over to me and made a make shift sling.

“This will make it easier for you until we can get you to a hospital.” He said.

“Thanks Jacques.” I smiled.

“Don’t sweat it, I’m usually the one who rescues the girl from their psychopathic boyfriend.” He said.

Going back to the crib he went to pick the baby up.

“Jacques you’re being a fool.” Rayne yelled.

Jacques paused and turned to face Rayne he lifted up his fist and smacked Rayne right on the chin.

“That’s for breaking Skyler’s arm asshole.” Jacques snapped picking up the baby and opening the door for me.

Rayne laughed,

“Call that a punch!” he said.

Suddenly he tore his wrist free from the thorns and then his ankles. The thorns seemed to wither away and die as Rayne broke free. Jacques stood protectively in front of me with the baby.

“If you want a fight little vampire then I’ll give you a fight.” Rayne said.

“Leave him alone!” I yelled at Rayne.

Rayne shifted his attention onto me and snapped, “I’ve had enough of you defiance Skyler. If Jacques gets hurt- and he will- it will be your fault.”

I swallowed hard and tried to think of what to do.

“I could take you on,” Jacques said, “You demonic princes are nothing more than talentless glory boys that enjoy nothing but then posing and letting off hot air.”

“Jacques!” I gasped.

Rayne smiled cruelly, “I’ll show you the power of a demon scrawny vampire.”

Approaching Jacques Rayne suddenly paused. A loud thud behind him caught his attention.

“Really Rayne, fighting a vampire- what would the boss say? Demon on demon would be a much better match. I could never say no to wrestle with you Ra-Ra.” Loki said.

Before Rayne could react Loki grabbed him and threw him out the tower window. Turning to us Loki bowed slightly and said,

“I’ll distract.” He then jumped out the window too following Rayne.

Jacques and I stood speechless for a few moments and listened to the enormous bangs and explosions that followed Loki’s and Rayne fight. Taking my scythe and book I led Jacques out of the tower.

“What are we going to do?” He asked me looking at the baby.

“I don’t know.” I said thinking about what Rayne had said earlier.

The baby was a demon, it did not share the same emotional spectrum as a human. Rayne was cold as ice until I accidentally bound myself to him. It was only then that he learned what love was. Demons cannot love until they are given a soul mate. So what if I gave the baby a soul mate. But where would I find one- it had to be a new soul, a baby that was not suppose to exist but came into existence…

“Dahlia.” I said outloud.

Jacques jumped, “What did you say.”

“I was so stupid, the answer was staring me right in the face. Dahlia is the answer, Stephanie’s baby. Stephanie was supposed to die but Rayne saved her. So Dahlia shouldn’t exist either- Dahlia is a new soul. I got a plan! We need to get back to the vampire castle.”

“But an angry army of demons stands between us and the portal.” Jacques said.

“Maybe we could use the grimoire and make another portal.” I said flicking through the pages.

The page stopped and I read the chant aloud and castle dissolved around us and we faded into the familiar gloomily corridor of death’s castle- this wasn’t where I wanted to be.

“This isn’t the castle.” Jacques pointed out.

“This is Death’s palace.” I replied.

“I’m sure your dad would help us out.” Jacques whined.

“He’s not my dad. He’s my father. There’s a difference.” I said coolly.

“This isn’t a time to be dwelling on your daddy issues, Sky. We are kinda up shit creek here.” Jacques said.

My mother and father stood waiting at the bottom of the corridor. Jacques nervously glanced towards me as my father, Death himself walked towards us.

“I see the grimoire came in handy after all.” He smiled.

“Yeah, thanks.” I said flatly.

“And the child is still alive.”

“He won’t be for much longer if we do not get back to the vampire court. So we can’t hang around.”

My father edged towards me lowering his voice,

“I know you are still mad at me and your mother , but for what it’s worth we are both very proud of you.” He said.

I didn’t reply. After everything I had been through I really couldn’t muster the strength to put on a display of civility towards my estranged parents. My father patted my broken arm then tore off the sling.

“Your arm is fixed.” He said.

Once again I thanked him politely.

“Well, Skyler, I think it’s time you left. The grimoire and the scythe are yours. Please tell your brother he is welcomed back anytime he likes. Until next time daughter.” He said waving his hand.

The corridor faded and we were back in the castle corridor just outside Mia’s room. The door was ajar and we could see a distraught Luc holding Mia’s hand watching her face for the tiniest sign of life. Our presence caused him to stir, Luc looked at us and then to the baby.

“Is that Dahlia?” he asked.

Luc used to be really handsome but worry and sadness had really sucked all the life out of Luc. He rose to his feet and whispered,

“That’s not Dahlia is it.”

Jacques handed me the baby and stood in front of me. Luc’s eyes widened,

“You brought that abomination into my house. It must die, yes it must die if Mia is to awaken again.” Luc said dramatically.

Jacques turned to me and said,

“Go find Stephanie, I’ll keep Luc here busy, but hurry Luc is really strong.”

With that I bolted up the corridor to Stephanie’s room. I burst open through the doors and found Stephanie sound asleep with Dahlia in a moses basket next to her bed. Quietly I crept across the room and lay Gwendolyn’s baby next to Dahlia. Opening the grimoire I found the text that I had once read aloud in my Grandmother’s kitchen. The same text that bound my soul to Rayne’s.

I read the text aloud and watched in fascination as Gwendolyn’s son went rigid. Dahlia carried on peacefully sleeping. As I said the last word, the baby boy made a funny cry and then fell asleep. I paused- was that it? At that point Luc burst through the doors with Jacques clinging on to his leg.

“Where is it? Where is he!” Luc yelled.

Stephanie sat bolt upright in bed and stared at all of us in amazement. Sleepily she mummered,

“Cheese does this, mom always said don’t eat cheese before you go to bed. I should have listened to her.” She lay back down to go to sleep but I jabbed her,

“This isn’t a dream.” I snapped.

“What-huh?” Stephanie looked up to see Luc lumbering towards the Moses basket dragging Jacques with him.

“Which one is it?!” Luc demanded.

Stephanie looked inside the basket and saw two babies.

“Holy crap! Did I have twins! I don’t remember having twins.”

“Shut up you silly girl!” Luc yelled.

“Excuse me!” Stephanie snapped.

“Tell me which one is Gwendolyn’s son or I will kill them both.” He yelled.

Threatening a mother's new born baby was the worst mistake Luc had ever made. Even though Stephanie was tiny and had as much strength as the normal human being she lunged herself off the bed onto Luc's face like a rabid cat. Luc staggered back in a mixture of horror and surprise. Jacques took the opportunity to restrain him but Stephanie was still clinging on to him refusing to let go. A weird scuffle ensued with Luc walking blindly into random objects trying to shake Stephanie and Jacques off of him.

At that point I heard the bedroom door squeak. I turned my head and saw in the door way a very confused and tired Mia who was watching her husband stumbling around the bedroom with Jacques and Stephanie attached to him. Irritably she snapped,

"Luc stop dancing about with Jacques."

Luc's whole body froze, Stephanie and Jacques let go of Luc. Luc's face almost burst into tears when he saw Mia standing in front of him. He burst across the room and dragged her into his arms repeating her name running his hands over her. Mia smiled softly,

“I missed you too.” She said hugging him back.

“How, why, who,” Luc mumbled incoherently at Mia who pulled away from him for a brief moment to say,

“Skyler made the right choice by saving this little one and Jacques made the right choice by listening to me.” Mia looked at Jacques and warmly said, “I’m so glad you remembered what I said. You always pull through for me Jacques.”

“What about me?” Luc snapped indignantly.

Mia raised a sceptical eye brow, “You always end up going on a homicidal rampage.” She said.

“But I never left your side once.” Luc replied.

“Great, so who has been looking after our kids?” Mia snapped.

Luc’s face went blank.

“Typical.” Mia sighed.

Collapsing down on to the floor I smiled at the nameless little baby boy. I had saved him and given Dahlia a soul mate. I hope in time she will come to thank me for that. It was over. Finally it had ended.

Now there was only one last thing to do standing up I said,

“I have to go and get Rayne.”

“What about the baby? Who’s going to look after him?” asked Stephanie.

Jacques wandered over to the baby and picked him up,

“I’ll look after him, Christie would love to have a baby- she can’t have children,” He said sadly. “But she would love him- we both would.”

“Thank you Jacques,” Mia smiled. “I know you’ll be a great dad.”

“What are you going to call him?” Stephanie asked.

“Hmm.. something theatrical but not too over the top,” Jaques paused, “Orlando.”

Luc raised his eyebrow, “Orlando?” he repeated.

“Yes, Orlando, after Shakespeare.” Jacques said.

Luc groaned and sighed, “Well he’s your son.”

Mia nudged Luc and snapped, “Orlando is a lovely name.”

“Yeah, all fear the anti-christ like demon, Orlando.” Luc sighed.

A week later…

Rayne stood in a white toga stiffly holding a bunch of grapes while Francois cowered in the corner. A mixture of laughter and horror overcame me as Piggy snapped her fat fingers at Rayne who robotically lowered a grape into her gaping mouth.

“Lovely darling!” She said petting Rayne’s hand.

“I wondered why you never showed up at my house again.” I said to Piggy.

“Well darling, Loki told me not to come, I would have sent a message but Francois,” she said staring daggers at the tiny scrap of a man in the corner, “Broke his ankle carry my sedan chair. I haven’t left the house for days darling or I would have claimed by Heracles sooner.” She smiled at Rayne who could only scream ‘HELP ME’ with his eyes.

“Well I fulfilled my end of the bargain.” I said.

“Yes, yes, I release him back into your care.” Replied Piggy who snapped her fingers and Rayne was no longer dressed in a toga but was back in his usual tight jeans and t-shirt.

After the fight I discharged Rayne straight into Piggy’s care. I hadn’t spoken a word to him since the tower incident. Rayne followed me out of Piggy’s palace and then shimmered us back to our apartment.

“Why?” he asked.

“You locked me in a dungeon and you were the only chip I had to bargain with.” I replied.

“But why did you leave me with her for almost a week. Do you realize how hungry I am?”

“You can starve a little longer Rayne. You almost ended up destroying the world.”

“I was trying to protect you.”

“You should have trusted me.” I snapped.

“Baby I’m sorry. Love drives us to do crazy things.” He replied reaching out for me. I pulled away from him.

“This is going to take some time to forgive you.” I said.

“I understand.” Rayne said softly looking the picture of dejetion. My heart gave sigh and I couldn’t help but quickly brush my lips over his just as he was about to walk away. He paused and stared at me hope flickering in his eyes.

“That was for trying- but I swear there will be no sex for at least a month after this.” I said firmly.

“Sure thing.” He taking off his shirt.

“What are you doing?” I asked trying not to smile.

“Disobeying you.” He said pulling me against him and lacing his fingers through my hair.

I opened my mouth to protest but he quickly silenced it with his. My whole body filled up with desire and I couldn’t focus on anything but him. Wrapping my legs around his waist he carried me along the

corridor. I had missed him so much and just wanted to melt into him but-

“DUDE! That’s my sister!” Matthias yelled.

Rayne groaned, and dropped me gently to the ground. Awkwardly I stared past Rayne at Matthias who was staring at the pair of us in disgrace in his boxer shorts. Disgustedly he snapped at Rayne,

“Put your shirt back on.”

Catching my breathe I calmly said to my brother,

“You know, you could go back home Matthias. Mother and Father said you go back.”

“Nah I like it here now.” He said.

Rayne grabbed my arm and lowered his voice, “I really need you now.” He said to me.

“Matthias, shouldn’t you be at work.” I said.

Matthias looked at the clock.

“Shit! Dalton we got to get a move on!” He yelled.

Matthias disappeared back into the lounge. Rayne smiled at me and bent down to pick up where we left

off but then the front door opened. Bea, Greg and Kai wandered in with bowls of popcorn and DVDs.

“Movie night.” Bea yelled excitedly.

Rayne gritted his teeth and I smiled weakly at him,

“I did say we would watch the new bear movie Bea brought.”

Rayne nodded and put his shirt back on. The doorbell went again and half the royal vampire family including Stephanie showed up. Sophie stepped inside the corridor and said,

“We brought soda and pizza!” Flashing a couple of carrier bags filled with goodies.

Jacques followed behind with Christie who was holding little Orlando closely to her,

“Do you think this film is really appropriate for a baby?” She asked Jacques.

“He’s a baby darling, he won’t know.” Jacques replied.

Mia and Luc followed, they had left their twins in the care of Nico the head guard and were arguing about

some brand of toy Luc didn't approve of. Casper followed after that with Stephanie and Dahlia. We all went into the lounge after Dalton and Matthias left and celebrated our new life with popcorn and a homicidal bear movie. Snuggled up to Rayne on the couch I looked around me at the room full of people all chatting and laughing.

'Look Grandma,' I thought, 'I'm never going to be alone again.'

Chapter 59

Special Announcement

"Mabel?"

An unfamiliar heat prickled through my veins. Something was happening—something I couldn't stop or ever undo. Pain blossomed through my chest as emotions I'd never experienced poured into me. Love, warmth, desire, all for him.

I clutched at my chest and through ragged breaths, said, "This is impossible—this can't be happening."

Yet it was. Even now, I could sense the tiny invisible threads knitting my soul to his.

Sebastian appeared to be experiencing some discomfort too, but was more concerned about me. He strode to my side and murmured gently, "Breathe through it. The pain will pass momentarily."

His voice was a cooling salve against the blistering heat in my chest.

"What's happening?" I gasped, already knowing the answer to the question.

He closed his hands around mine and stared deeply into my eyes, causing heat to prickle along my skin.

"You're my luna, Mabel," Sebastian declared.

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- **An exiled wolf**
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- **Pack secrets**
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Thank you so much for supporting my stories—your love for Dark Black Magic has meant the world to me, and I can't wait to share this new journey with you.

About the Author

angeltwist